NF

ISSUE #48:
THE LEGACY OF SUPER MARIO BROS.

SUPER MARIO
3D WORLD DELUXE

SUPER MARIO
3D REMASTERS

PIKMIN 3
DELUXE

PAPER MARIO:
THE ORIGAMI KING

LEGO
SUPER MARIO

MIN MIN IN
SUPER SMASH BROS.
ULTIMATE

LEFT IN THE PAST:
HOTEL MARIO

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION:
MARIO & WARIO

XENOBLADE
CHRONICLES:
FUTURE CONNECTED

L IS REAL!?

CHARACTER PROFILE:
THE HAMMER
BROTHERS

SEPTEMBER/
OCTOBER 2020

MARIOS OF THE PAST

AS PROMISED IN our last edition, we're continuing our efforts to bring the entire Nintendo Force back catalog back into physical availability, a few issues at a time. Last time we chose a trio of past publications that related in some way to the content of our newest release . . . so let's do that again! To complement the launch of this newest Mario-on-the-cover NF issue, we're reactivating print edition sales for the three past Mario-on-the-cover NF issues shown below.

First up, we've got an issue that still boasts one of my favorite front covers we've ever done, even all these years later: NF Issue #8, The Road to Mario Kart 8. It's the same image from the original Wii U box you saw on store shelves, sure, but Nintendo kept Mario rightside-up on that package! They shouldn't have wimped out – they should have played up the gravity defiance of the gameplay by inverting our hero. So, we did!

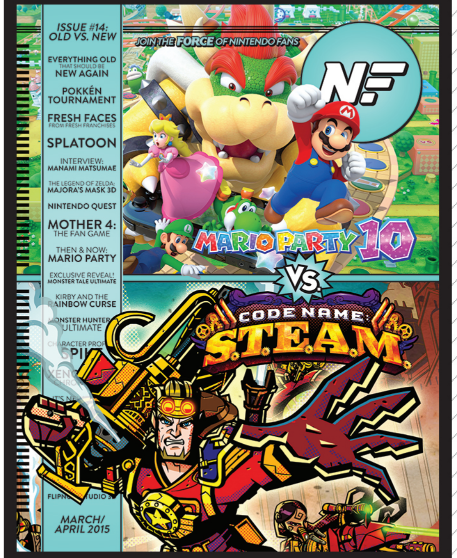
Next, the end of 2014 brought us the long-awaited arrival of the Smash Bros. series on Wii U, as well as the launch of the amiibo product line! It's wild to go back and look at that first set of 12 figures now. The amiibo line has exploded in quantity in the years since (and quality as well, since some of those first few figures were pretty rough).

Finally (for now), I've managed to engineer an excuse to print a Code Name: S.T.E.A.M. image here in the magazine again in the year 2020! What a criminally overlooked and underappreciated game. NF Issue #14 positioned it as an example of Nintendo trying something new, and pitted it against Mario Party 10, representing the company continuing to fixate on an old brand. It's a discussion that's still ongoing today . . . so maybe revisit its origin point? **— LUCAS**

NFMagazine.com/Shop

ISSUE #8: THE ROAD TO MARIO KART 8

ISSUE #12: THE GRATITUDE PROJECT



ISSUE #14: OLD VS. NEW

Continue to stay tuned to this same space for even more reprint announcements in the future!

ISSUE #48: THE LEGACY OF SUPER MARIO BROS.

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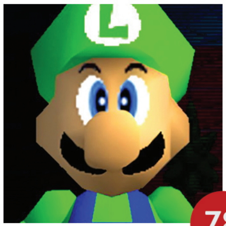
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ON THE COVER

Normally the front cover position of our issues gets awarded to a new, upcoming game that is approaching its release date. But not this time! For this edition, the cover goes to an old classic that is approaching the 35th anniversary of its release date: Super Mario Bros.! That's its vintage NES black box sprite art up at the top, and to illustrate how far Mario has come since those days, we commissioned 3D artist Nicolas Rusignola to re-create the same scene with a modern Mario. Watch out for that lava!

14

SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2020

INBOX

MARIO'S MILESTONES

An anniversary is upon us!

. . . Well, OK, when it comes to Mario, some kind of anniversary is always upon us. His career has been so long and so varied at this point that you could find a new major milestone to celebrate for one or more of his classic adventures any time you wanted to, really, in any given year. But this year is a big one! This year is when Super Mario Bros., the original masterpiece that first spun "Super" Mario and his brother Luigi off into their own epic adventures, is turning 35.

The exact birthday we're looking at is September 13, because that's the date in 1985 when Super Mario Bros. first went on sale as a Famicom game in Japan. The NES hardware had not yet launched in the United States at that point, but it did just one month later on October 18, 1985, so that's the secondary date to celebrate. And since this is our September/October issue, it only made sense to dedicate this NF edition to praising that first-ever trip into the Mushroom Kingdom!

We've got a 35-year retrospective on just why Super Mario Bros. was so great in our Retro section this time around. Then, for our central feature, we've assembled a complete "Legacy of a Masterpiece" timeline that travels year by year through Mario's career so far, but focusing most on the ongoing influence of Super Mario Bros. in particular. Even now, over a third of a century after its original release, characters, music, gameplay concepts and more elements that were introduced in that 1985 classic are still influencing new games. The longevity of the enemies is especially wild to me! Who could have ever imagined that the idea of turtles that stand on their hind legs, wear helmets and constantly throw hammers into the air would still be resonating so many years later? (We've got the Hammer Brothers in the spotlight for our Character Profile this time, by the way.)

There's more Mario fun to find beyond that, as well, including our review of Paper Mario: The Origami King and a look at Luigi in Super Mario 64. (He's finally been found! Seriously! L was real all along!) Altogether, I'm hopeful that this latest NF edition will help you to appreciate Super Mario Bros. even more than before, and get you hyped to celebrate its 35th anniversary!

Lucas M. Thomas

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ISSUE #47:
JULY/AUGUST 2020

It's a double dose of mustache might, since we're following up last issue's Paper Mario spotlight with this Super Mario special! Due to some shuffling of plans, the Player's Poll questions answered below were actually printed two issues ago, though. First, we wanted you to tell us which "Super Mario" game is your all-time favorite – whether a main adventure or one of the series' many spin-offs. Next, we wanted to know if you've ever managed to finish the original Super Mario Bros. yourself. (Some of you have had 35 years of opportunity to do so, after all!) And lastly, we wanted you to look to the future and dream up new games for Mario to take on as he heads toward 40 years old (and beyond!). What's your ideal Super Mario sequel? Here's what several of you had to say. (I wish we had the space to print even more!)

LETTERS

My all-time favorite Super Mario game will forever and always be Super Mario Sunshine. I'm not sure if it was the upped graphics compared to Super Mario 64, or just the new world and characters introduced. I remember staying so immersed that the different levels I jumped into were various homes I came to recognize. "There's the kitchen, there's the living room, and oh oh here's my bedroom!" When in actuality we were on some beach where a bunch of stingrays had made a mess that I never minded to clean up because it was FUN to clean in this game!
– CLARISSA ARVIN

My all-time favorite Super Mario game has to be Super Mario World. It was the very first SNES game I ever owned back in the summer of '92. It means a lot, because my family was not well off by a long shot, yet my parents still managed to buy me an SNES with Mario World for my 12th birthday. I spent lots of hours with that game. **– JUSTIN WRENN**

While I like all Super Mario games, I think some of my favorites would be New Super Mario Bros. Wii, since it was my first ever game, Super Mario Maker because I love the idea of making your own Mario levels, and Super Mario Odyssey since there's a lot to do and collect in it. **– GREYSON HEIT**

While I am super nostalgic for both New Super Mario Bros. and Super Mario 64 DS, I will have to say my favorite Super Mario game is Super Mario Odyssey. I know in recent years criticism has grown, but I can't help but enjoy the exact stuff many seem to not enjoy. The fact that there's a secret around every corner or a challenge waiting for you is a thrill I do not get tired of. Every kingdom is unique and has its own style that keeps the game refreshing. Even thinking about it now, I want to go and 100% it again!
– LIAM WOOD

I've never actually beaten Super Mario Bros. :(**– DAVY LAWRENCE**

The original Super Mario Bros.? I curse my lack of skill – I could always make it to the last world but never beat it!
– DAVID O'BRIEN

I've come close to beating the game but I never have. I will probably beat it in the future, but right now I have not. My experience with the game is good. I think the farthest I made it was World 8 and then died. But I always die in the original Mario. **– MADDIX DJ DASILVA**

I was about 5 or 6 when my parents bought an NES for our family. My sister Kerri (who is a couple years older than me) used to play it quite a bit while my younger brother Zach would watch. Zach wasn't old enough to make Mario do what he wanted him to do, but from watching Kerri, he knew exactly what to do. Therefore, when I was in World 8-4 and I had to work my way through the castle, my brother was able to guide me through exactly which pipes I needed to go down in order to get to the end. With

OPPOSITES ATTACK!

You know what I would really like to see? Some sort of Mario & Wario adventure game, where the two team up. I think it's time Mario tries some roasted garlic or something. You know, stuff Wario likes. Mario has done it all by now. Maybe the next step is to befriend Wario and have some sort of collaboration: Wario Land 5: Super MWario Land. (I'm laughing as I write that. But hey, maybe it'll happen!) **– B.Z.**

I think a darker-themed Mario RPG could be a lot of fun. My dream future Mario game would be a lengthy RPG set in a dark world where Wario and Waluigi are the bad guys. **– GEORGE L.**

Whether teaming up or facing off, more Mario and Wario on the screen together in a real adventure would be great!

my heart pounding, I made it past Bowser and we were jumping and hollering for joy when the princess was not in another castle! Without my little brother guiding the way, I don't think I would have made it. **– MATTHEW ELLIS**

While it is true that Nintendo tends not to make direct sequels to the mainline Mario games – with the exception of Super Mario Galaxy 2 – I feel that the capture mechanic introduced in Super Mario Odyssey still has a lot of untapped potential. So, a sequel to that game, perhaps throwing in some of the elements that made the Galaxy games so enjoyable – their constant variety and innovation and the grandeur of the soundtrack – would make for a great next Super Mario adventure if you ask me! **– WOLF DE WITTE**

How about a Mario/Sonic crossover where Mario and Sonic team up to save both of their worlds! **– DEL SYDEBOTHOM**

It would be 3D like Super Mario Odyssey – but different enemies, and Luigi would be a playable character. And the end boss would be Bowser Jr.! **– HENRY FRANCISCO**

Wow! The sky's the limit with Mario! Then again it really isn't, considering Mario's been through the galaxy and beyond! I would definitely love to see Mario reinvented somehow. Much akin to Paper Mario. Perhaps a Mario made of clay or LEGOs or candy! Can you imagine!? If not that then how about Super Mario Maker 3 . . . D! (See what I did there?) A Mario Maker where you construct your own 3D worlds would be the most amazing dream come true! **– ALBERTO VILLASENOR**

I was born in 1991, and the original Super Mario Bros. was my first video game and what got me into the world of gaming. I begged my Mom for "a Nintendo" for my 6th birthday and remember being overjoyed playing it on her old TV. Those memories have lasted me and my best friend a lifetime. How can it not be my favorite?!

And with that said . . . I have never been able to beat that game, ha ha. At least not traditionally. When the Virtual Console came out and Restore Points were added, I finally did it!

I would love to see a new 2D Mario game that isn't in the "New" line. We've seen enough revisions of those games. **– JOHN KNUDSEN**

Everyone wants Super Mario Odyssey 2, but I honestly don't think that's going to happen (though after Breath of the Wild 2, I guess anything's possible). I've been thinking a lot about another New Super Mario Bros. for the Switch, but with new features like more playable characters (namely Peach and Yoshi), more power-ups and overall some fixes to the problems everyone's had with the series. **– MATTHEW WEINBERG**

I would LOVE to have a 2D Mario game in the style of the old Mario boxarts! That style has always been so pleasing to look at. I'm surprised they never used it in recent games, outside of U.I. elements. A full-fledged game in that style would be such a treat for the eyes! **– BIO21**

We've seen Mario tackle nearly every genre, like racing, RPGs, multiple sports games . . . yet there's still some unexplored territory Mario has yet to set foot in. I'd love to see a life sim Mario game in the same vein as something like Tomodachi Life, in which you raise Toads and build up the Mushroom Kingdom! You could also populate this world with other Mario characters like Piantas, Yoshis, Nokis and Lumas. Each type of character would have different interactions with each other and they would offer unique materials to make the Kingdom as creative as the player would like! **– JOEY ROSSI**

DON'T ANGER THE OX

Mr. Ox,

I have really been enjoying Animal Crossing: New Horizons. But there is one thing that really bugs me about the game (and it's not the actual bugs!). Why doesn't K.K. Slider wear clothes? All the other animals do! What do you think about that? **– KATIE H.**

Well, Katie, just between you and me (and anyone else who reads this, I suppose), the truth is that K.K. *is* wearing clothes, and has been the whole time. He's just rocking a full-body white outfit, sort of like what Elvis Presley used to wear, but without the flashy accents (because that's not how K.K. rolls, you see). You'd be surprised by how many people make that mistake!

THE POWER OF THE POSTERS

Nintendo's own Chad Concelmo is back in the NF Inbox! Three years ago he appeared in this same spot because we had to immortalize his impressive feat of mountaineering in print: He climbed to the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro, and brought his Nintendo Switch with him! This time around, we're preserving this image he shared on Twitter of the massive poster wall he's set up in the office at Golin LA. It seems he's both Director of Public Relations there, as well as Director of Poster Placement! Not every adornment seen here shipped alongside an NF issue, but most of them did. Can you count all the NF posters?

THE PLAYER'S POLL

Congratulations to **Henry Francisco**, the winner of our Super Mario Player's Poll! Your new chance to win is below, and this time around we're interested to read your responses to some questions about third-party game publishers!

QUESTION #1

Who is your favorite third-party publisher on the Switch? (Meaning a company other than Nintendo that publishes games on Nintendo's system.) Why?

QUESTION #2

The Switch has done a good job of bringing in new brands, but what's a third-party series you'd still like to see on Switch?

QUESTION #3

Do you find yourself buying and playing many games published by companies other than Nintendo, or do you stick to first-party first and foremost?

Email your responses to **PlayersPoll@NFMagazine.com** with the subject line "Player's Poll for Issue #49" – this time, one reader whose answers are picked for print will win a brand-new copy of the third-party Switch game of their choice!

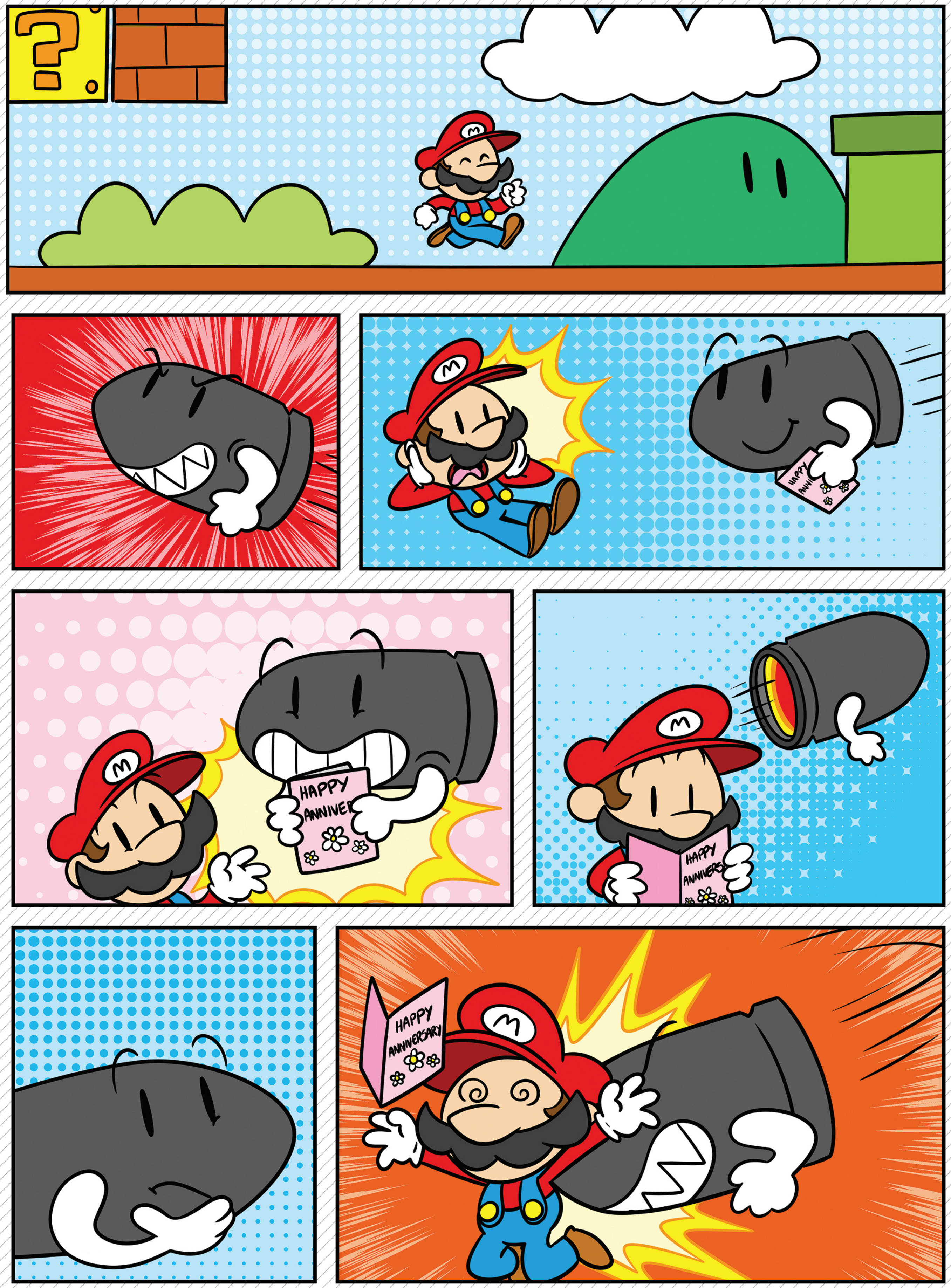
NINTENDO FORCE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Lucas M. Thomas @NintendoForce

STAFF WRITERS
Evan Campbell @evancampbell
Chris Carter @DtoidChris
Kevin Cassidy @GoNintendoTweet
Jonathan Holmes @NonTrotski
Kevin Knezevic @kevknez
Brett Martin @NightramVGMM
David Oxford @LBD_Nytetrayn
Nadia Oxford @nadiaoxford
Tony Ponce @megaStryke
Kris Randazzo @GeekadeKris
Rebecca Rudranath @strawbecky_81

STAFF ARTISTS
Mark Kelly @Fryguy64
Lindsey Layne King @Jazaaboo
Matthew Loffhagen @kotorcomics
Matthew Taranto @MatthewPTaranto
Thor Thorvaldson @thormeister1971

CONTRIBUTOR
Nicolas Rusignola @Nintega_Dario



BY MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN

The Most Expensive Mario Cart

Mario claims another crown: the highest-selling video game ever sold at auction!

MARIO IS NO stranger to getting lots of coin on his many adventures, but a recent development might have surprised even him.

Most of Mario's funds usually tend to disappear once he collects more than 99 of the local currency. However, according to a report from Global News, a copy of the original Super Mario Bros. for the Nintendo Entertainment System – the very same game whose anniversary we're celebrating throughout this issue – was sold at auction for $114,000!

Converted to Mushroom Kingdom 1-Up currency, that's worth about 1,140 lives. Or, compared to how much the game went for new when it was originally released all the way back in 1985 ($25), you could have gotten 4,560 copies of the then-new game for what this one copy went for now (none of this is adjusting for inflation, mind).

But don't think you can just go digging through your shelves, shoeboxes or wherever you might keep your old NES games and not have to worry about rent money for some time. There are a few qualifiers here.

For starters, no Duck Hunt here, so that probably sets it apart from most copies of Super Mario Bros. for the NES on the market. Secondly, this one is still sealed in its original trappings – box, plastic wrap, the whole nine yards (or should that be "eight worlds"?). That means it's never been played, and in all likelihood, never will be, as it's been "slabbed" – placed into a plastic case that's securely locked and never meant to be opened. Think Stinky Pete the Prospector from Toy Story 2, frozen in carbonite.

Even further beyond that, Heritage Auctions, who hosted the auction, noted that it was not only still in its shrinkwrap, but it had a cardboard hangtab (the thing that lets stores place them on pegs) underneath, meaning it was one of the first rare variants of this release. To top it all off, Wata Games gave it a grade of 9.4, the highest known for such a sample, and the seal itself was marked at an A+, which is just barely short of their highest grade, A++.

Valarie McLeckie, director of video games for the Texas-based auction site, said that "The demand for this game was extremely high, and if any lot in the sale could hit a number like that, it was going to be this one."

Other NES titles included in that day's "Comics & Comic Art" event included Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!, The Legend of Zelda, Contra and a sealed early copy of Super Mario Bros. 3, rated a 9, which "only" pulled in $38,400 alongside its older brother.

> "$114,000 for a sealed copy of Super Mario Bros.? I don't think I could ever justify dropping that much on something like that. Now, Super Mario Bros. 2, on the other hand…
> – DAVID

Animal Crossing Cashes In

New Horizons is shattering series sales records and moving into the mainstream!

MARIO'S NOT THE only Nintendo hero who's enjoyed a recent windfall – it turns out Tom Nook's been turning quite a tidy profit of his own. Not due to a single cartridge selling for a sizeable sum, though, but due to an enormous volume of individual sales of the Animal Crossing series' newest release, New Horizons!

Thousands of sales. Millions of sales. *Tens of millions* of sales, and all within the short span of time that's passed since last spring. It's truly incredible – New Horizons just launched worldwide on March 20 this year, and as of June 30, it had already sold over 22,400,000 copies. *22.4 million in only three months!*

Its total has surely climbed even higher by now, but that's the number reported by Nintendo during the company's most recent quarterly sales update. It's insane! That volume of copies sold means that New Horizons has already become the best-selling Animal Crossing game ever. It's the second best-selling Nintendo Switch game, having already surpassed Super Smash Bros. Ultimate and The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, and it's closing in on the current #1, Mario Kart 8 Deluxe, faster than a Blue Shell. It also just overtook Super Mario Bros. for lifetime sales in Japan, defeating its total, accumulated over 35 years, in a span of less than 3.5 months. Wild.

So, why? Well, 2020 has provided a perfect storm of circumstances to help fuel this success. Here in the States, lockdowns due to COVID-19 began in earnest across the nation in mid- to late March, right when the game hit. And its gameplay, offering a second virtual life on a tropical island, is perfectly suited for fighting back against the cabin fever of being cooped up at home for days, weeks and months on end. Its communication features, like being able to visit friends' islands, have helped people maintain relationships while also maintaining safe physical distance.

And it's been widely embraced by the mainstream as well. Gary Whitta, previously best known as a co-writer of Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, struck gold when he set up his island home to include a talk show set and began inviting celebrities to visit for interviews with their avatars. Brie Larson, a vocal Nintendo fan and herself a bigger celebrity than ever thanks to her appearance as Captain Marvel in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, has directly advertised for the game and started a YouTube channel where, in part, she shows off her island. Brands from Cottonelle to Wendy's have used the game for their marketing – Hellmann's Mayonnaise is even donating to charity in exchange for players' spoiled turnips!

Nook is a mastermind. He played the long game and won big. **– LUCAS**

LET'S LE-GO!

Our review of the LEGO Super Mario Starter Course.

SUPER MARIO MAKER is a game in which you build and design Mario levels and play through them. The LEGO Super Mario kits are sets of blocks you use to build and design Mario levels and play through them. While one is digital and one is physical, the concept is essentially the same.

The Starter Course is pretty hard to get right now, and if you buy it from a store you'll need to make sure that the box hasn't been tampered with. I had to buy three before I found one intact with the Mario "robot" part that makes all the sets playable!

The Starter Course comes with a Goomba and Bowser Jr. for enemies and a flagpole and Question Block for other interactives. The enemy builds are ingenious and keep the LEGO style, while somehow also keeping the Mario style. It also comes with several types of "terrain." Blue pieces represent water, green is ground, white is cloud, red is lava and grey is brick or concrete.

OK, now we can talk about what Mario can do with all of it! Once you grab the app and connect Mario, it will show intuitive directions for how to build the set, build your level and do things like speed runs. He has bright lights and a camera in his feet that register which terrain he's standing on. The terrain will show on his chest screen, as well as a timer and other info and interactions.

The best parts of the set come from interacting with the items and enemies that have scannable panels. Mario starts a level by scanning the starting pipe, and then it's game on! Stomping the Goomba will net you coins, and Bowser Jr. must be stomped six times to "defeat" him. You can grab special items like coins or a Super Star from the Question Block, and reaching the flag at the end signifies the end of the level. The app then gives you your stats on that run. Can you beat your high score? The whole thing is brilliant and is really something to behold.

My kids loved it. The build, the level design, the interactivity. Everything. They played for hours. I think it's one of the most interesting playsets LEGO has ever devised, and it will be fun to expand on it for ages.

But . . . where's Luigi? I would have also enjoyed more major character interactivity, but it really is great on its own.

9.0

ADD-ON ADVENTURES

An explosion of expansions has appeared!

LOOKING FOR A way to make your Starter Course even cooler? LEGO has unleashed an avalanche of expansion kits to use with your new Mario robot! Choose from the smaller $20-$30 sets like Desert Pokey or Mario's House, or head to the big bad's home with the $99 Bowser's Castle. The next most expensive set at $70 is the Toad's Treasure Hunt set, which may have the cutest Toad and Toadette figures ever made. Each set has a baddie you can't get anywhere else, like the $50 Guarded Fortress set that features a Piranha Plant and a Koopa Troopa, or the $30 "Boomer" Bill set that has a Shy Guy. There are also 10 blind bag figures for $4 each. That set will be hard to complete, as there are no clues on the bags!

Collector's Corner is compiled by Brett Martin, the world record holder for the largest collection of video game memorabilia on Earth. For more cool collectibles and information on how to order from import shops, visit his site, The Video Game Memorabilia Museum, at videogamemm.com.

A New Console for Christmas

Hallmark is continuing their new tradition of offering Nintendo ornaments.

BRING SOME NES grey to your green Christmas tree! Then press the power button and, true to the hardware it's mimicking, a red light comes on. (That's a little more Christmas-y.) The surprise is the sound: The theme from Super Mario Bros. starts playing, but there are also sound effects that accompany the track. It ends just as you'd expect, by Mario reaching the virtual flagpole and going into the castle! This visual and aural treat will set you back $20.

This System is Totally Bricked

LEGO had one last surprise in store for the LEGO Super Mario launch!

JUST LIKE MY original model, the NES is getting a lot of play lately. LEGO surprised the gaming community with this amazing set that recreates many living rooms from the '80s, but that isn't the only trick they had: The TV scrolls through a Mario level when a handle is turned on the side. If LEGO Super Mario is placed on the TV, the sounds and music play as Mario traverses the level. I also can't emphasize enough how cool it is that the cartridge you build actually goes in the machine just like it should. This 2,646-piece set retails at $229.99. (And they will restock!)

amiibo UPDATE

WE HAVE WALKED through the desert of no amiibo before, friends, and after another trip through the figure-less wasteland, we once again see an oasis on the horizon!

Masahiro Sakurai stated that there would be amiibo for DLC characters long ago, but with several Directs and announcements going by without any mention of amiibo, you wouldn't be blamed for doubting their return. Luckily, Nintendo has elected to continue the brand – and now we have our next two heroes on deck (and what is essentially another promise that each playable character in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate will receive an amiibo).

The next two amiibo are the first two DLC characters announced: Joker and Hero. They'll release in October.

Joker, as a reminder, is from Persona 5 – a game that has still yet to see a port to Nintendo Switch. It seems feasible, but a lot of time has passed since his announcement without any scrap of non-rumor news on this front. This amiibo release may inspire a new glimmer of hope, but I wouldn't bet my collection on it.

Hero is from the Dragon Quest series, and naturally the hero from the latest game (Dragon Quest XI) gets the amiibo figure. He was the face of the fighter anyway, even though several iterations are available to choose in-game.

We also now can be assured that Banjo & Kazooie, Terry, Byleth and Min-Min will join the lineup soon! And then five more for the fighters after them!

Pikmin 3 Gets Chomped

The Wii U eShop has delisted the original.

THE DIGITAL DELETION continues.

After years of waiting for such an announcement to appear, Nintendo finally revealed Pikmin 3 Deluxe recently – you can read more about it in our Previews section later in this issue. But the story here is what happened immediately after the existence of the new Switch version became public knowledge: The original version got the axe in the Wii U eShop.

This isn't the first time such a delisting has happened. For example, about a week before the Nintendo Switch port of Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze went on sale back in 2018, its Wii U digital edition disappeared as well. It was a move Nintendo clearly made to encourage sales of the newer, shinier Switch version, of course, but it was also a pretty anti-consumer thing to do. The Switch port was priced at a full $59.99 MSRP for its debut, but the Wii U download had been just a third as expensive, at $19.99. Rather than let the customers decide whether or not the addition of Funky Kong as a playable character was worth a $40 mark-up, they simply removed the choice entirely.

Now Pikmin 3 is in the same position. But it happened even faster this time, as rather than waiting until just before the planned October 30 debut of Deluxe, the Wii U digital edition has already been removed. It was also available for $19.99 up until its removal. And Pikmin 3 Deluxe will also be $59.99.

Removing the option to download digital versions of games doesn't delete the physical copies of those same games from existence, so they're not gone for good – but it makes them harder to come by, and is just a pretty grimy thing to do. As of this writing, Super Mario 3D World is still downloadable on Wii U for $19.99, so you might want to grab that one soon, in case it meets the same fate! **– LUCAS**

One Empty World

Super Nintendo World is done, but not open.

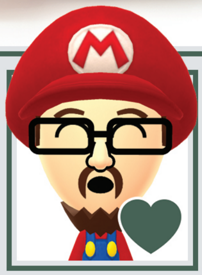
THE MOMENT WE'VE been anticipating for years has finally arrived: Super Nintendo World, the first-ever Nintendo-themed amusement park, has completed construction in Japan. It's ready to open its doors and welcome in guests to see its sights and ride its rides!

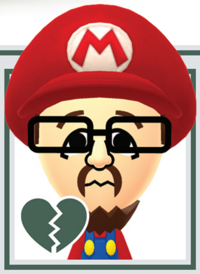
. . . So, why are those doors still closed?

If you guessed "coronavirus," then congratulations, you got it right again. Summer 2020 has been the target for opening this all-new kind of Nintendo experience since it got out of its concept stages years ago, but no one back then could have anticipated a future in which it's unsafe for crowds of people to gather together in close proximity. Super Nintendo World will open up at some point, but now we don't know when.

It gets worse for Western fans: The Orlando, Florida location of the same Super Nintendo World park has had its construction postponed indefinitely. It was most recently targeted for an opening in 2023, but now that's all up in the air. Ugh! **– LUCAS**

Great!
Pikmin 3 is finally coming to the Nintendo Switch!





Oh.
Its original Wii U version is a lot harder to get now.

FORECAST

A meteorological look at the biggest game and DLC releases currently scheduled to debut in the next few months.

LET'S NOT BEAT around the bush: The Forecast is looking bleak. We're getting to a point about half a year deep into the global-scale chaos caused by COVID-19, and it's absolutely having a major impact on previously laid plans. A few release dates are still firm, though, including LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga, which is due to debut on October 20. It might sell better due to lack of other, competing new releases.

THE HALLOWEEN SPOT held down by Luigi's Mansion 3 last year has been awarded to the newly revealed Pikmin 3 Deluxe here in 2020. We've got a preview prepared for your perusal over on Page 48! As we go to press, this is the only first-party game with a locked-in date on Nintendo's upcoming release calendar. Yikes!

WE'VE GOT TO go ahead and tiptoe into November to find another firm date to report, and we've got one for the also newly revealed Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia. November 3 is the date it'll go on sale in the eShop, and in stores with both a standard release and Deluxe Edition that packs in an Ultima Dragonoid alongside a few other goodies. More about this one over on Page 53!

ONE WEEK BEYOND that, it'll be harvest time. Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin opens up digital downloads on November 10 — and it's also just recently been revealed that physical versions will be available on that day as well! I've got a few thoughts to share on that, so if you care to read them, flip over to Page 17.

THE REST OF the outlook is an ingloriously jumbled mixed-up mess of rumors, hearsay, poppycock and hogwash. It's very likely that Nintendo has more planned for the rest of 2020 than just Pikmin 3 Deluxe, but they've been frustratingly silent about what that would be. The strongest rumors suggest that Mario will shoulder the burden of the holiday shopping season with remastered versions of past 3D games, including Super Mario 3D World (see Page 44), Super Mario 64, Super Mario Sunshine and Super Mario Galaxy (all on Page 46). But none of those are confirmed yet . . . and just as we were about to finalize this issue, the old Skyward Sword HD rumor popped up again! Is any of it real? We'd love to know!

> We may be in the midst of an overall shift in Nintendo's marketing strategy. Whether a deliberate adjustment or one forced upon them by the unique circumstances of this year's global events, the company seems to somehow be becoming even *more* secretive about upcoming games. Alas. We shall endure the long stretches of silence and continue to look forward to what comes next . . . whatever and whenever that is. **— LUCAS**

WITH FIVE MORE fighters still waiting to be unveiled for Super Smash Bros. Ultimate's second Fighters Pass, we could conceivably get fresh news on that front soon. But I also think an overall push-back of the timetable for that Pass could very well be happening behind the scenes with Mr. Sakurai, so let's give the DLC highlight spot to something that's more of a sure thing: The Crown Tundra!

You're just a few page flips away from my review of The Isle of Armor, which was Part 1 of the two-part Pokémon Sword & Shield Expansion Pass. Part 2 is The Crown Tundra, and I'm still thinking it'll appear in November, at that same time of year when The Pokémon Company usually pushes new games in the series to store shelves. Maybe they'll even do new physical versions of both Sword and Shield with the DLC included on the cart? That would be getting into new territory for them, but I could still picture it happening pretty easily.

The debate over which Tundra-dwelling Legendary Bird is best is already taking place here in the Thomas house. My vote is for Zapdos! (But Carter likes Moltres better, and Calvin's all-in on Articuno.)

The Pink Gold Peach Problem

The Mario Kart roster is expanding exponentially . . . but only on mobile.

OUR SPOTLIGHT IS shining on the classic Super Mario Bros. for this issue of NF, as its fast-approaching 35th anniversary is certainly cause for celebration. To counterbalance that good will a bit, let's complain about another Mario game that's quickly nearing a more ignoble milestone: Mario Kart Tour is just about to turn one year old.

Our hopes were high for mobile Mario Kart – at first. The promise of being able to play a true Kart series installment via smartphone touch-screens seemed fun. We figured it would have downgraded gameplay when compared to its counterparts on consoles, but were prepared to forgive such flaws introduced entirely by the phone format.

We should have turned our worries elsewhere. Mario Kart Tour came along and its gameplay is perfectly serviceable by mobile standards, but the place where the game is really objectionable is in its aggressive monetization. It gouges you. It tries at every turn to persuade you to open your wallet and invest in subscriptions and Gold and Rubies and probably some other kind of wacky imaginary currency by this point too. I haven't wanted to pay any attention to the game since its launch, really . . . but my attention nonetheless keeps getting drawn back to it. Because of its characters!

Mario Kart Tour now, inarguably, boasts the best roster of drivers the series has ever seen. It has to! The Gacha model it's built on – which draws players in to gamble with their real-world dollars for just a small-percentage chance to "pull" a great new character – absolutely relies on having a near-constant siren's song of attractive new drivers being added into the mix to drive more and more spending. Many other mobile games do the same thing, including Nintendo's own Fire Emblem Heroes trotting out dozens of deep-cut characters from that franchise's 30-year history, as well as Dr. Mario World recasting everyone in the Mushroom Kingdom as medical professionals. Dr. Waluigi? Dr. Baby Daisy? Dr. Goomba Tower, which is literally just three Goombas wrapped in a lab coat? All in the mix.

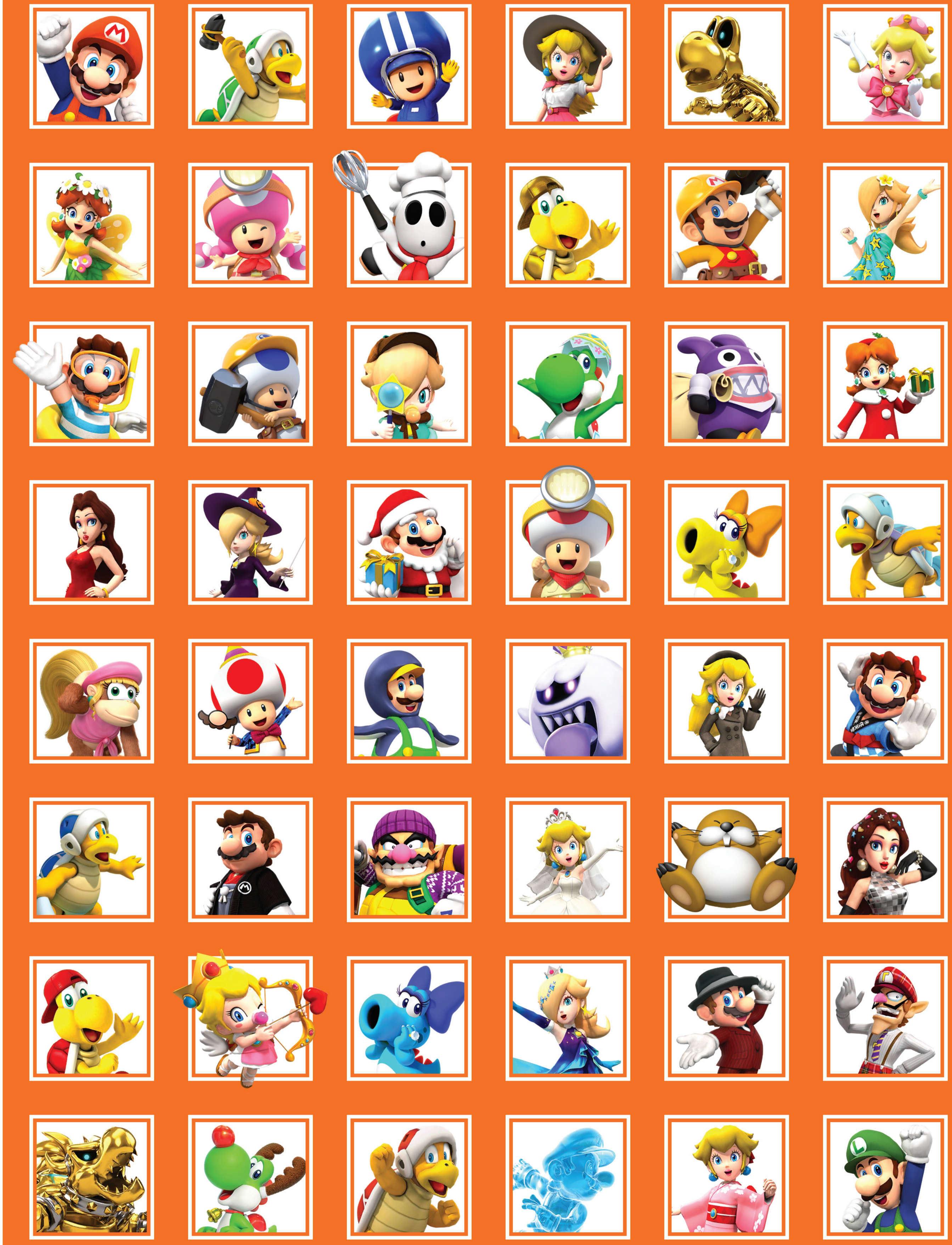
And yet none of that aggravates me as much as Pink Gold Peach.

Here we have this mobile Kart game opening the floodgates and finally giving us new Kart drivers many of us have wanted to see behind the wheel for years, like Captain Toad, Nabbit and Dixie Kong. But in the main series? No such luck.

Fans have been getting frustrated over the Paper Mario series no longer giving us unique new characters, but I'm over here still angry that when Nintendo had the chance to better utilize their already-existing characters in Mario Kart 8, roster spots went instead to recolors or costumes of Mario himself again, and then the absymal invented-just-for-Kart-for-some-reason *Pink Gold Peach*. And now the fun, unique characters are being set free for a mobile game instead? Bah.

This is mostly just me venting, but I'll attempt to offer a solution before wrapping up that would appease me: Bring the entire Tour roster into Mario Kart 9 whenever that inevitable game arrives, and then add even more fresh faces beyond that. It would be criminal for the greatest Kart roster ever to stay locked down behind a Gacha gate in a mobile game forever. Leave Tour with only Mario series stars too, and add more crossover flair to MK9, like how Link and Isabelle were in MK8.

Oh, and cut Pink Gold Peach. Please. **– LUCAS**



A TRULY IMPRESSIVE ROSTER . . . BUT ONLY ACCESSIBLE IF YOU SPEND TONS OF CASH

MARIO KART TOUR'S CASCADE OF CHARACTERS

Just take a look at this lineup! It's a wild mix of different tiers of effort. On the lowest rung of the ladder, there are simple recolors of standard characters – see the two new hues of Birdo in the mix here. Then on the next level up, you've got fancier recolors that kind of/sort of count as unique characters à la Pink Gold Peach – examples include Gold Dry Bowser and Ice Mario. One step beyond that, there are the dozens of costumes! Outfits previously seen in other games, like Builder Mario and Wedding Peach, are joined by brand-new threads never seen before, like Daisy dressing up as a fairy and Waluigi pretending to be a London bus driver! (Please don't ride on any bus Waluigi is driving.) Finally, of course, there are the Mushroom Kingdom characters making their playable Kart debut, like Monty Mole, Pauline and Hammer Bro!

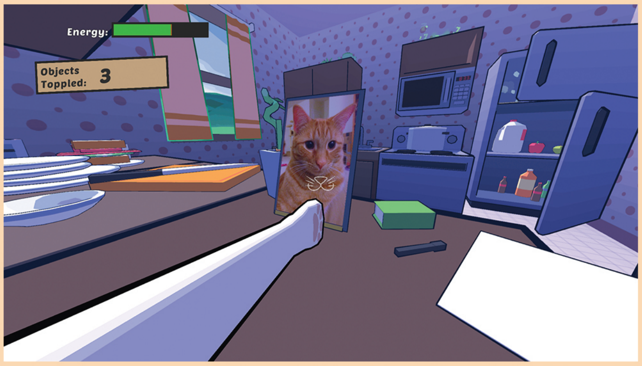
Anger of an Intern

Forcefully assert yourself in the new Say No! More!

WHEN MARIO FIRST went Super in 1985, he was one of the first working stiffs in games who was willing to run hog wild through a massive obstacle course of oppositional jerks and unhappy campers. That unbound spirit comes on strong in Say No! More, an upcoming action game that encourages assertiveness at every turn. Influenced by slice-of-surreal-life titles such as Muscle March and Incredible Crisis, the game casts you in the role of an office intern working in a world where everyone is expected to say "Yes" to everything. It doesn't matter if a supervisor is asking you if you like your job, if you'll shine their shoes or even if you'll let them eat your lunch, there is only one answer they want from you. It's a psychologically oppressive scenario that many people-pleasers are sure to relate with.

Things change when you stumble upon a classic Walkman-style tape player. Pressing "Play" tunes you into an incredibly intense, muscular, middle-aged man who yells at you, but in a good way. He's there to pump up your confidence and teach you to say "No!" to anyone who dares to treat you with disrespect or inhumanity! He also teaches you to clap with emphasis when you're faced with a social situation that you may want to take control of. Is someone from another cubicle suddenly making fun of you for having weird hair? Just start clapping while they're in mid-sentence, interrupting their worthless opinions with a series of loud sounds. Sooner or later, they'll get the hint. Then, after they're thoroughly confused, hit them with the loudest "NO!" you've got and watch the impact from your exclamation send them through the air like a rag doll.

The challenges to your patience and self-esteem continue to mount from there, though the atmosphere never stops being lighthearted and silly. The plan is for the game to be controlled with just one button, so don't expect it to get too complicated, but with the ability to make friends at lunch breaks, alter your vocal inflection, and make your enemies "feel listened to, but sarcastically", there's plenty of ways to change things up. Right now, the hope is for Say No! More to be released on NO-vember 9, which is particularly funny to the developers, a group of native Germans who say "Nien" instead of "No". Hopefully we'll be saying "Yes" to their unapologetically madcap adventure on that date! **— JONATHAN**



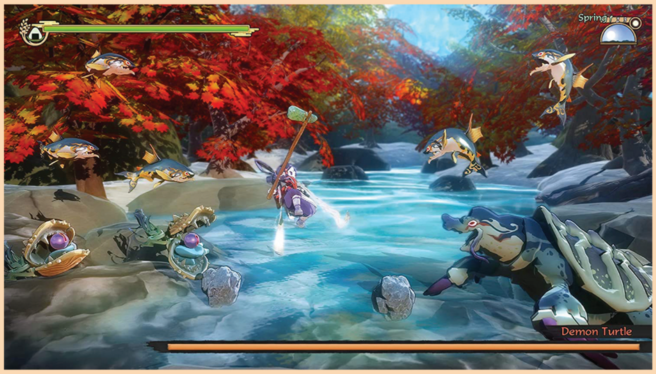
Fury of a Feline

Wreak havoc as a housecat in Catlateral Damage: Remeowstered!

CATLATERAL DAMAGE DIDN'T get a ton of coverage on traditional game websites when it was first released as a free, proof-of-concept PC title in 2014. The mainstream media, on the other hand, ate it up. NBC News said that the game was "a joy to play" and indicative of a future in which video games were no longer dominated by "first-person shooters, but [instead] high-end cat simulators." While we haven't seen that future come to pass quite yet, there's no denying that "mischievous animal games" have blown up since then, with titles like Goat Simulator and Untitled Goose Game going on to sell huge numbers. Catlateral Damage helped set the stage for them both, and now that it's had some time to sharpen its claws, it's poised to pounce on players once again.

The game was born from the real-life cat-owning experiences of developer Chris Chung. He's also a lifelong Nintendo fan, and with Catlateral Damage, he's done his darnedest to fuse Super Mario 64's groundbreaking level design with the kinds of free-spirited nonsense that was more commonplace at the dawn of the 3D platformer genre. Its simple and clean polygon-based graphics may spark nostalgia for those in their 20s and 30s, though the gameplay itself was designed to be enjoyed by people of all ages. Chris also borrowed a bit from the Smash Bros. brand of physically satisfying comic violence. When these ferocious felines wind up and let loose, it just feels good no matter how many times you've toppled the same set of plates. Much like the life of a real indoor cat, it can get a bit repetitive – but since everything you do is fun, that's not such a bad thing.

This "mew and improved" Remeowstered version offers the visual upgrades and other bells and whistles that you might expect in an updated re-release. The same first-person (or should that be first-feline?) view from the original game remains, tasking players to run rampant through various rooms, jumping to high places, knocking stuff off tables and even catching a few rodents along the way. New for this enhanced port are additional ways to litter the place with chaos, like scratching curtains, napping in obscure spots and riding a robot vacuum. COVID has hit the game with a delay, but there's still a chance that Catlateral Damage will make its mark on the Switch eShop before Christmouse. **— JONATHAN**



ESCHEWING eSHOP EXCLUSIVITY

Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin is the latest previously digital-only game to announce a physical edition.

LIKE THE WATERS in a well-tended rice paddy, the division between the digital and physical realms of video game product launches has become muddy.

Five issues ago, in our Pokémon Sword & Shield edition, we presented an introduction to a new protagonist who rejects all swords and shields – and any other traditional weapon, in fact – in favor of facing foes in fights with farming tools instead. Sakuna is her name, and if you're like me, just that first preview was enough to get you to add her game, Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin, to your eShop wishlist. With that small task accomplished, I could just kick back and wait for a release date announcement to roll in, letting me know when I'd be downloading this combination of combat and cultivation.

The announcement came . . . but with it arrived a secondary reveal that has become more and more common with promising-looking Switch eShop exclusives: Sakuna's eShop exclusivity has been axed.

It's not a bad thing. I'm fully in favor of offering options to potential purchasers of your product, and I'm sure that there are faithful physical game collectors and preservationists who are applauding this reveal, just the same as there are digital-only diehards who couldn't care less. But having to make the decision between the two formats is tricky for people, like me, who are stuck in the middle. In my personal Switch library, I have a fair number of physical copies. But I've got plenty of digital versions too. My brain gets less strained when a new release is available only through the eShop, because then there's no decision to make. My mind has been made up for me. Now, though, with Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin approaching its November 10 debut, I've got to pick if I stick with downloading it, as originally planned, or if I get physical.

And then there's another choice: the standard edition or the "Divine Edition" seen to the left. I get excited about big boxes full of bonus items, sure, but then I'm hit with the reality of owning them long-term. Where am I going to put all that stuff once the initial hype for it all has worn off?

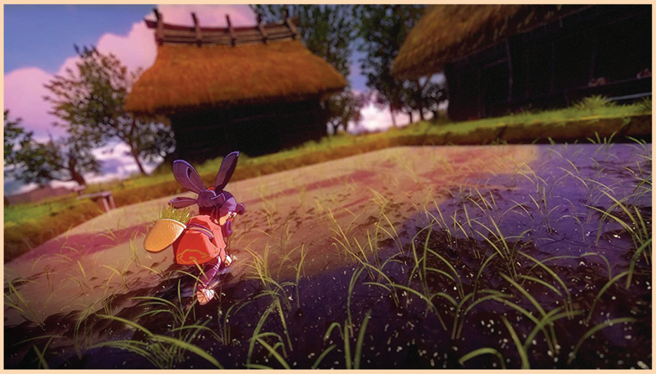
And this isn't the worst quandary I find myself in. Sakuna has at least announced these options in advance of its release. There are tons of eShop greats now regularly getting amazing-looking physical re-releases months or even years after their digital debuts, through companies like Limited Run Games (and the 137 copycats that have sprung up in the last few years to clone their business model). So, when an awesome eShop game is released and it *doesn't* announce a physical version in advance, should I hold off on buying it at all, crossing my fingers that Limited Run will reveal one in the future, if I can just be patient?

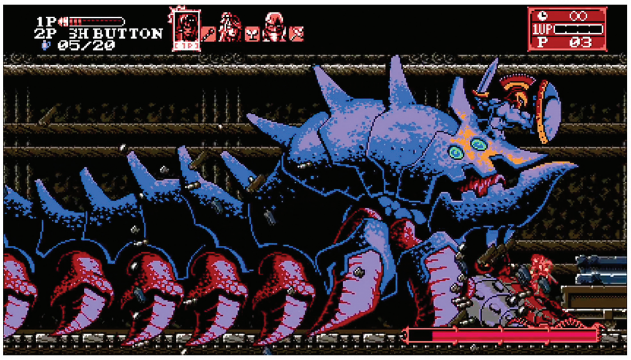
. . . I don't have any answers yet. This is an issue that is only growing in intensity as the years go by. So let's use Sakuna as a springboard, shall we? Let's start here and keep this conversation going in future issues. Stay tuned, and I'll report back about which Sakuna I end up supporting. **– LUCAS**

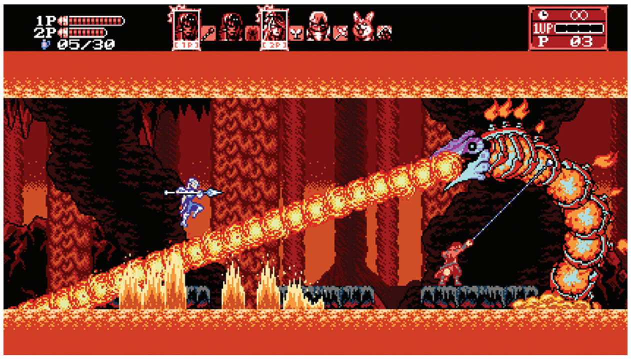
PACKED FULL OF EXTRAS

THE DIVINE EDITION

Some publishing companies, like XSEED, have earned a reputation for offering elaborate physical editions of their new releases, replete with all kinds of tangible extras. For Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin, XSEED has crafted this "Divine Edition." It offers the game itself accompanied by a 130-page artbook, a 42-song OST split across three beautiful CDs, a small Japanese omamori charm that's promised to bring you good luck in both fighting and farming, and finally a special outer box featuring exclusive art. It's $59.99, compared to $39.99 for the standard version.







Another Horrible Night

BLOODSTAINED: CURSE OF THE MOON 2

WHEN IT LANDED two years ago, Bloodstained: Curse of the Moon was a pleasant surprise that made the wait for the main Bloodstained adventure much easier. Still, as well as it was received, I doubt anyone could have imagined a direct follow-up would be announced and released so soon – especially when development of Ritual of the Night's stretch goal content remains ongoing.

Not that I'm complaining!

Curse of the Moon 2 is a textbook sequel that provides more of what fans loved from before. Are you itching for another return to that 8-bit "Classicvania" aesthetic? Did you love the character-switching adopted from Dracula's Curse? How about the Veteran and Casual difficulty modes for either a "Nintendo hard" experience or a more relaxed treatment? Check, check and super check!

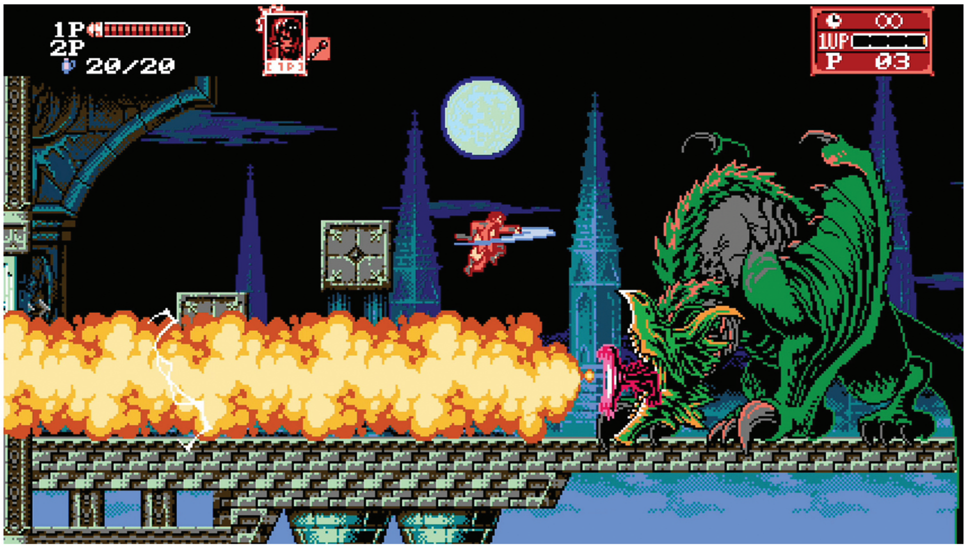
Whereas the original was but an opening act bound to a specific template, this sequel is free of those shackles. Many of the enemies, bosses and environments have no Ritual of the Night analogs, and while the demon-hunting ronin Zangetsu returns to headline this adventure, his lineup of traveling companions has seen a shake-up.

You may recognize the exorcist Dominique from her more three-dimensional incarnation, but Robert and Hachi, whose playstyles are unlike anything we've encountered in a Castlevania title, are fresh faces with whom you'll fall in love immediately. (FYI, Hachi is a corgi who pilots a steam-powered mech. That fact alone should easily net him the title of Best New Character of 2020!)

If a hyperintelligent pooch sounds silly even by Bloodstained and/or Castlevania weirdness standards, it's because Curse of the Moon 2 is more willing to embrace levity for the sake of entertainment. Little flourishes – such as relationship-building cutscenes during which our heroes go fishing, play pranks or tell campfire stories – do more to endear these characters to the player than did any of the copious blocks of dialogue text in Ritual of the Night.

But one element the first game actually did better was the manner in which teammates are introduced. Previously, you were given three options: recruit a potential ally, kill them to absorb their powers or ignore them outright. Each choice influenced how challenging the remaining adventure would be, what ending you'd receive and which game modes you'd unlock. This time, your new friends force their fellowship without your input – as a result, what little moral agency we were once allowed has been shelved in favor of a slightly more simplified unlocking progression.

Forcing an expanded party does work in the game's favor, however, as the early levels serve as smartly crafted obstacle courses meant to introduce their unique abilities and sub-weapons. It's clear that Inti Creates excels at teaching via level design rather than obtuse tutorial prompts, encouraging exploration of



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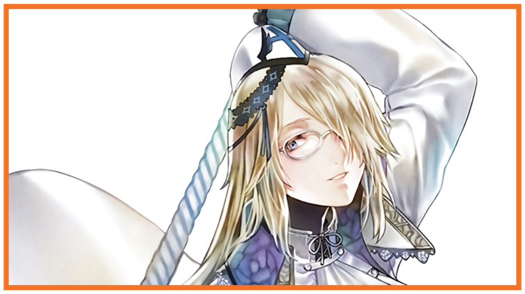
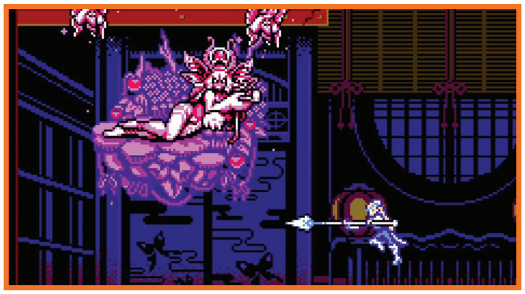
SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: INTI CREATES RATING: T



A SPEAR-WIELDING EXORCIST

DOMINIQUE

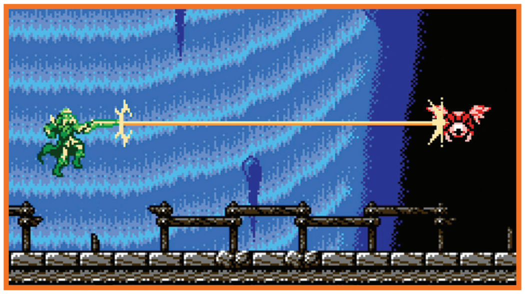
In case anyone's still confused as to how Curse of the Moon meshes with Ritual of the Night's lore, allow me to stress that these two sub-series exist in alternate realities. Consider the church-appointed exorcist Dominique, whose role here stands in stark contrast to her other appearance. Like Miriam in the previous game, Dominique can jump higher and has a longer reach than her allies. She wields a spear for a combat style not unlike Eric Lecarde's in Castlevania: Bloodlines, and she can also heal teammates or even revive them.



A MARKSMAN WITH A MUSKET

ROBERT

Bloodstained and Castlevania have offered dozens of means to dispatch the creatures of the night, yet the use of standard firearms has been largely avoided. For this reason, the sharpshooter Robert is a breath of fresh air. Sure, he may have the shortest health bar of the crew, but he can snipe any foe from a distance with his musket, then follow-up with his Partisan, Grenade or Drake Cannon sub-weapons. Robert can also crawl through narrow spaces and perform wall jumps, useful for skipping entire sections of some levels.



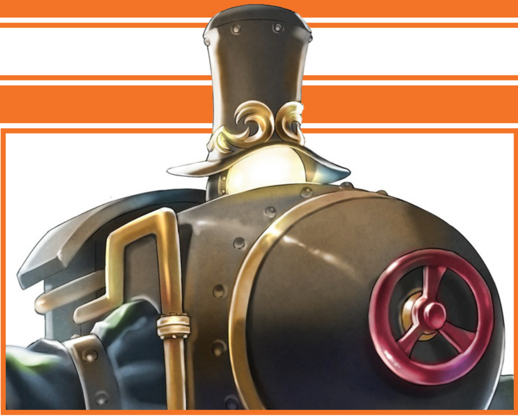
the tools available to better prepare players for later challenges. The downside is that the difficulty can rise sharply when selecting a character for whom certain hazards have not been specifically tailored – just try navigating the rotating platforms in Stage 07 without Hachi's hover ability and count how many stress pounds you put on in the process!

There's no worse feeling than discovering an efficient boss strategy, only to lose your MVP and either attempt to eke out victory via attrition or allow the rest of the team to fall, thereby restoring your party to full strength at the cost of a life. It's a good thing that bosses only regain a portion of lost health after you respawn, otherwise you might really be up the creek against these behemoths – like the returning Gremory and her cascading swarms of demon bats! (Why are their flight paths so difficult to predict!?)

As before, your adventure doesn't end after a single run. There are a total of four Episodes that provide remixed challenges with unique final bosses – save for a pair of truly "out of this world" levels at the end of the final Episode, you replay the same set of stages with different starting parties. While revisiting the same locales three times at minimum to achieve the true ending can wear thin, you aren't entirely retreading familiar ground since you can make use of previously inaccessible shortcuts and alternate paths. You'll also be reunited with the crew of Miriam, Alfred and Gebel from the first game, eventually giving you a whopping seven demon slayers to cycle through on the fly!

And to further highlight the importance of camaraderie, a friend can pick up a second controller for some good ol' jump-in/jump-out couch co-op. Both players select from the available party, with the exception of a blue-tinted Zangetsu variant exclusive to Player 2. Should one of you fall, hit the Plus Button to immediately return to the fray with one of the remaining warriors. In this way, you can pick up one another's slack and sally forth with fewer momentum-halting checkpoint respawns than you would flying solo!

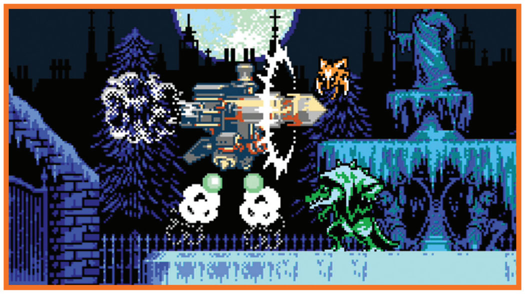
Backers of the Bloodstained Kickstarter may have been enticed by the promise of more Igavania fare, but the quality of the Curse duology proves that there are other branches of this budding brand that can and should be explored further. Curse 3 in 16-bit, anyone? **– TONY**



A MECH SUIT . . . PILOTED BY A CORGI?

HACHI

Have I mentioned that Hachi is a corgi who pilots a steam-powered mech? That's not the only reason why I adore this fluffy doggo – in full armor, Hachi is an absolute unit! His health bar is enormous, his punches deal twice as much damage as the others' attacks and his hover ability can carry him safely over chasms or enemy fire. Floor spikes crumble to dust when he trundles through, but when extra protection is necessary, Hachi can burn through mana to make his armor impervious! He's my favorite by far . . . and he's a *good boy!*



No Such Thing as a Free Lunch

POKÉMON CAFÉ MIX

I LOVE PLAYING food-related video games and seeing re-created recipes from games and other media as much as the next gourmand, but Pokémon Café Mix is one example that left a bad taste in my mouth. It's another one of The Pokémon Company's free-to-start offerings that has been released for both the Nintendo Switch and smartphones, and unfortunately it falls under the dreaded "I only need one more move!" curse so common to popular mobile puzzlers.

You clear puzzles of Pokémon icons by "stirring" them to blend up high-scoring combos, and the more you clear, the more you power up your café worker partner's special attack. There are also "gimmicks" in almost every level that have various methods to clear: multiplying honey, nuts to crack, floating soda bubbles and three-step obstacles like cheese and sugar cubes. You have a limited number of moves to make per level, and using them up will prompt you to pony(ta) up Golden Acorns to add on three more. This would be fine, except that the price to do so is *900* – and you gain only a fraction of that for each level you clear. You can get additional Acorns through reaching goals or filling up stamps on your daily card, but the most reliable method is through in-app purchases. I bought a few bundles to help me through some tough stretches, one of which included a Sweets Pikachu who was a big help . . . sometimes. Like most modern mobile puzzle games, you get a limited amount of retries for failed levels that refresh every 25 minutes, making this a title that's better enjoyed in short bursts.

Most annoyingly, there are levels that seem to be designed specifically for a particular Pokémon and their special skills. I found myself hitting a wall at a couple of points, having missed the opportunities to recruit Togepi and Munchlax and their respective special skills in previous levels. With no way to revisit a previous level, the only way I was able to get enough Friendship Stars to recruit them was to hold a party, which lets you entertain two potential workers once a day. If you don't get the ones you want, you have one free refresh – but after that, it's time to either say goodbye to lots of your precious Golden Acorns or wait until tomorrow.

Pokémon Café Mix's one saving grace is its art style. Newer Pokémon like Steenee look very much like their in-game counterparts, but others have gotten "cuteified" with expressive eyes and features – check out how happy the normally intense Lucario looks in this style! The mix of Pokémon you can hire includes old familiar faces like Bulbasaur and Squirtle, but you can also meet and recruit newer characters like the Galar starters, among others. Even the various food offerings – beverages like Litwick hot cocoa, Rowlet pizzas and fluffy Eevee pancakes – look like they could be served at the official Pokémon café! (Although, do you really want to eat a pasta dish that looks like a Yamper's butt?)

If the retry cost and amount of Golden Acorns you win after clearing a level were rebalanced, I'd feel more comfortable recommending this title – but as it stands it's just another microtransaction-dependent puzzle game. **– REBECCA**

4.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: GENIUS SONORITY RATING: E

Another Grand Slam

SUPER MEGA BASEBALL 3

AFTER SCRAPING BACK from a multi-run deficit, my Blowfish team actually has a chance to put the Sirloins away in the bottom of the ninth. Sting McGee steps into the batter's box. On the mound is the opponent's closing pitcher, Franz Zilla.

McGee whiffs a pretty fat fastball close to the middle of the plate, though I guess I'm to blame. This makes the count full. Patience and composure are key in Super Mega Baseball 3. So, with that said, I take a deep breath and guess that another heater is on the way.

Crack! Good contact leads to a walk-off home run that sails just past the centerfield fence. And man, it feels good to come back to win 8-7. In fact, Super Mega Baseball 3 just feels great in general.

This baseball sim sports a cartoony style but features a pretty realistic approach to America's pastime. There are no official players or teams, as you probably guessed from my preferred choice of the Blowfish. But that doesn't hold it back.

Honestly the customizable players and teams add a ton of personality. I fondly remember stealing bases left and right with Windy Wheels of the Moonstars in the previous installment. This time Blowfish third baseman Keg Gutterson gives me a chuckle, plus some nice power hitting. And Joanna Heater has a dependable four-seam fastball out of the bullpen.

Now their names and looks can be altered to suit your tastes or to mimic your favorite professional players. Or what's more common: changing up the actual team name and uniforms. It's not difficult to find people online posting pictures of their Donkey Kong clubhouse or even Pokémon-themed squads.

None of this would matter, however, if Super Mega Baseball 3 didn't deliver satisfying and captivating action on the diamond. Thankfully, it does so in spades. There's almost an arcade feel to the game that's reminiscent of Major League Baseball Featuring Ken Griffey Jr. on Nintendo 64, or even Baseball Stars on NES. The game is easy to pick up for anyone, but also has depth for passionate followers of the sport.

The Ego system plays a major role in that. An incremental number that goes up to 99, each person can choose their challenge level. I dialed in at 59 here, which is pretty tough but doesn't require me to really mess with the batting reticule. In other words, I can focus on timing my swings without worrying about a specific part of the plate as well. This type of individualistic tinkering works wonders.

Where Super Mega Baseball 3 comes up short is the newly touted Franchise Mode. Offering multiple seasons with player signings and retirements, the offseason aspect misses the mark. It's a convoluted mess spread out over 30 steps where salaries go down the longer prospects sit on the market. As someone who's spent way too much time in similar modes for Madden, the whole thing left me wanting.

Another aspect that needs a bit more refinement relates to baserunning. This overall seems improved from the previous sequel, but there are still times when a player doesn't naturally tag up off a pop up or runs on a ground ball toward home plate idiotically. That said, as someone who played baseball through high school and even coached Little League, this stuff can happen.

Those issues, though, don't bring down the best baseball game on Switch and one of the best sports games period. Super Mega Baseball 3 is truly a blast, reminding me of my youth while also offering something new with each matchup. Here's hoping my Blowfish heroics continue well into the playoffs. **— EVAN**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: METALHEAD SOFTWARE
RATING: E

9.0

Rating the Ramen Bomber!

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE: CHALLENGER PACK 6

THE SMASH BRAND has extended its scope once again, reaching out and grabbing hold of ARMS to pull it into the Ultimate mix. Now, sure, Spring Man was already an Assist Trophy – but we can all agree that a series hasn't really reached the peak of recognition in this royal rumble until its star is fully playable, right? And when it came time to select one representative to battle on behalf of all the boxers, Spring Man got knocked out – in favor of Min Min, the Ramen Bomber!

I had convinced myself that time-twisting Twintelle would get the call to action, and largely because I thought her normal human arms would allow her to wield items. How could any other ARMS fighter hope to accomplish that, when their hands were all constantly gloved? Well, the solution was deceptively simple, in Min Min's case – her little Dragon simply chomps onto Bob-ombs, Poké Balls, Beam Swords and the like. It's constantly present on her left hand, and when it's not gripping a Home-Run Bat or Ore Club, it performs its usual function of blasting streams of fire at foes. It can also power up into fully scaled form (as seen below, and in ARMS itself), to deal more damage. Then it tops off its versatility by also giving Min Min access to a tether recovery! What a dynamic Dragon!

If you love it too, you can have two – Min Min's right hand can also equip a Dragon as well for double the danger. By default it's got the boomeranging Ramram instead, though. You can swap between them using her Down Special. My personal preference, however, is the third option: the massive Megawatt. It's slow, but packs such a satisfying wallop when you connect!

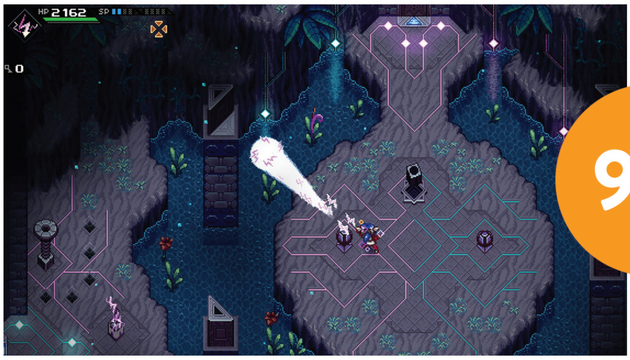
That's really a good summary of all of Min Min's core arm-extending attacks – their impressive reach is counterbalanced by sluggishness in many cases, and you'll have to put in a lot of practice with her in order to outwit expert players who'll have little trouble dodging up, down and around her largely telegraphed punches. It is possible to adapt to her melee-from-a-distance style, though!

While Spring Man didn't succeed in claiming the Smash invitation envelope for himself, the new arena that's been added to Ultimate along with Min Min draws its inspiration from his home turf: It's Spring Stadium, not Min Min's Ramen Bowl, that's been added to the massive list of stages. It makes sense. Ramen Bowl, while the better fit for Min Min thematically, is a very simple circular arena with a bowl-shaped depression in the middle in the actual ARMS game. Spring Stadium offered a better opportunity for Smash adaptation, and it's arrived reimagined as a large elevated platform bookended by two jump pads on either side (and one more hovering in the center). These springboards aren't always active, but when they are, leaping from them sends your fighter soaring skyward. It's another nifty battlefield idea in a game that has somehow not yet run out of them.

In the end, Min Min is a great choice who represents ARMS well, gives the roster a fresh female face and has reinvigorated my hype after the disappointment of Byleth. Bring on the next reveal! **– LUCAS**

9.0

DLC PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO, SORA & BANDAI NAMCO RATING: E10+



9.0

Finding Her Voice

CROSSCODE

I COULDN'T SPEAK for a month. Closer to two months, really – that's how long my mouth was wired shut after a botched wisdom tooth extraction left me with a broken jaw back in January. I'm better now, and can once again converse with confidence – but I understand the frustration of being literally unable to articulate your thoughts.

Lea, the star of CrossCode, is in the same situation. She's logged in as an avatar playing the MMO of the future, CrossWorlds, but something went wrong in her transition into her virtual body – her vocal ability didn't activate, leaving her having to navigate a world full of talkative foes and friends with nothing more than body language.

It gets worse! Lea has also lost her memory. Her real-world friends are hopeful that playing CrossWorlds will help her overcome her amnesia, since she apparently played it quite a bit before whatever incident it was that caused her to forget herself.

And so the stage is set for a novel RPG experience that actually gives the "silent protagonist" trope a new spin. CrossCode starts off strong.

Then it gets better! While it has the look of mid-'90s JRPGS like Chrono Trigger and you might expect it to feature traditional turn-based combat as a result, it subverts that expectation by centering on a battle system inspired by the twin-stick shooter genre instead. Lea's player class in CrossWorlds is called the "Spheromancer" – it basically means she's good with balls. (Yes, the game makes plenty of jokes about that.) She's able to hurl an endless volley of high-velocity spheres of energy at her enemies, peppering them from afar to drain their HP meters little by little. But that's just the beginning! That basic battle ability is supported by a huge suite of other techniques, as Lea can deftly dash out of harm's way, rush in for melee strikes, tap into elemental powers and more.

Battles are fast, frenetic and fun as a result. It's continually entertaining just to engage with low-level common foes, because lining up shots from a full screen (or more) away and pelting them into oblivion is so satisfying.

Then, it gets better still! Exploring the overworld gives way to delving into very Zelda-inspired dungeons, and they're full of expertly crafted puzzles. Many of them rely on Lea's expert ball tossing to solve, as you have to pay close attention to the angles of walls and objects in the environment to properly line up ricocheted shots to activate switches or destroy obstacles in your path.

Honestly, CrossCode was not at the top of my most wanted list leading up to its launch in the eShop in July . . . but it probably should have been! The developers here really managed to mesh great bits of past classics together with their own unique ideas and came up with a winner.

There's only one note I'd give them: The overworld areas and towns are really dense and a bit too large, making it hard to track down specific places and NPCs when you're trying to complete quests. But that's really my only complaint. I'm happy to applaud every other element.

As for Lea? Well, like me, she probably does get her voice back . . . as well as her lost memories. But I won't tell you that for sure. Because you should play CrossCode for yourself, of course! It's the most fun you can have with balls! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DECK 13 DEVELOPER: RADICAL FISH GAMES RATING: T

Preserving a Piece of the Past

TUROK

8.0

FOLLOWING THE LAUNCH of Super Mario 64, the release calendar for the Nintendo 64 was incredibly thin. Pilotwings 64 was the only other game available on Day 1, and nearly half a year later, the system's complete library still stood at just a dozen different games. That early drought meant that any N64 game that did manage to make it to market got to enjoy an awful lot of individual attention – and so it was that Turok: Dinosaur Hunter became the most popular and talked-about title among Nintendo fans for a while in early 1997.

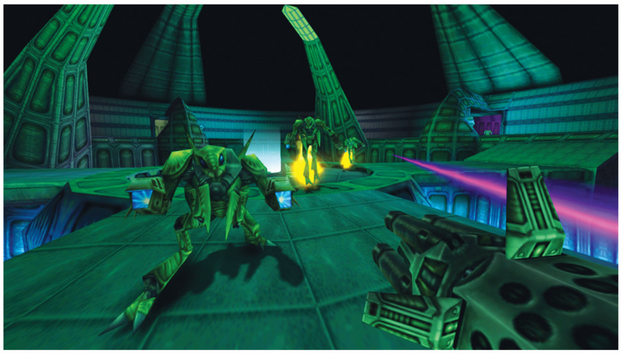
I was among them. I didn't plunk down the cash for a purchase back then – being just 15 years old and with limited funds, you see – but you can bet that it was swiftly rented from the local video store and found a temporary home with my brothers and I over the course of a weekend. The memories made on that Saturday and Sunday are over two decades old now, but they came roaring back to life as soon as I fired up Nightdive Studios' Turok Switch port!

We haven't seen a lot of revivals of 3D games from this era quite yet, and there are a couple of different ways to approach them: Developers can totally overhaul the source material and present a remake that simply captures the spirit of what '90s players once played, or else they can do what Nightdive has opted for here, and remaster the existing game, exactly as it once was. This is the original Turok: Dinosaur Hunter brought forward into the modern era – that means big, chunky polygons with tons of sharp edges everywhere, as well as original textures that wear their age with pride. So it simulatenously looks both great and terrible! Great if you put yourself in the right frame of mind to understand that these are '90s era visuals; terrible if you make the mistake of judging it in direct comparison to modern FPS adventures. I don't think there's much to worry about there, though. Nightdive knows that nostalgic older gamers are the target audience for this revamp, and its appeal is apparent from that perspective.

There are some modern amenities added in, though. Turok was a pioneering FPS that was originally challenging to control on the N64 due to its single stick, but here on the Switch we've got the twin sticks it always cried out for – as well as optional gyroscope control! It's not as smooth as something like Splatoon, but being able to fine-tune your aim for a long-distance arrow shot at a running raptor works fairly well. Combined with the amazing clarity and expanded draw distance modern hardware is able to bring to these old environments, it's a joy to run back through this vintage adventure.

One caveat, though. Being on the Switch now makes this classic Turok game portable for the first time, encouraging quicker pick-up-and-play sessions – but the save system in the game hasn't been upgraded to match. You'll still have to seek out the in-game save points in order to be able to record your progress. You wouldn't want to hunt the same dinosaurs twice! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS
DEVELOPERS: IGUANA ENT. & NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS RATING: M



The Retro Chaos Continues

TUROK 2: SEEDS OF EVIL

HITTING YOU WITH a double-header here, because when Nightdive adapted Turok for the Switch, they also picked up the rights to port its even more impressive successor. While Turok 1 made waves in 1997 and helped lay the foundation for the first-person shooter genre on home consoles overall, Turok 2: Seeds of Evil came along in time for Christmas of the following year and built more excellence on top of what had already been established.

. . . It probably should have waited a little longer, though. At the time, original publisher Acclaim wanted the sequel to ship in time for the 1998 holiday shopping season, so the developers at Iguana Entertainment didn't get to have quite as much time to polish the final product as they surely would have liked. The end result was a game that was still widely praised and which sold wonderfully well, but was knocked down a peg or two by the critics of the day for struggling with slowdown and just generally feeling unoptimized.

Now, over two decades later, there's been plenty of extra time to apply that polish. This is the silky-smooth Seeds experience – complete with crisp visual effects and the enhanced controls that Turok 1 got as well – that young kids who first played it on Christmas morning in 1998 were truly hoping for.

Not that young kids should play this. It's incredibly violent! At least by 1998 standards. Oddly, this version is rated T when the N64 original got an M. Big exploding polygons aren't the shock to the senses they once were, I suppose.

But that was a major selling point back then. Turok 1 kind of had the FPS space all to itself in early '97, but six months after its launch the groundbreaking GoldenEye 007 came along and claimed its crown. In trying to reclaim it, Acclaim and Iguana pushed the envelope on virtual violence further than ever before, ultimately arriving at the Cerebral Bore.

If you've ever seen or read anything about Turok 2 before, you know the Bore. It's a sinister, deliberately sick and twisted weapon. When you fire off a round of its ammo, a small, heat-seeking missile begins flying through the air, looking to home in on a foe. When it finds one, it swoops down from the sky and attaches itself to the top of their skull. Then, it deploys a drill. Blood, gore and gooey glops of brain matter spew forth from the poor soul's cracked-open cranium in an intentionally too-long death animation. Finally, the enemy's head explodes. Just to punctuate the moment, you know.

That's the high point of the Turok 2 experience, and reliving that iconic '90s ultra violence in 2020 is definitely a trip. But I don't want to sell the rest of the quest too short. The Bore is just one of 20 different weapons to wield here, and this adventure is more refined than its predecessor – playing them back to back, decades later, it's fascinating to get a fresh perspective on how much progress the developers were able to make with a turnaround of less than two years.

Nightdive's doing great work bringing the past back into the present, and I support their efforts! **– LUCAS**

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS DEVELOPERS:
IGUANA ENT. & NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS RATING: T

Now This is Podracing!

STAR WARS EPISODE I: RACER

IT'S DIFFICULT TO explain 1999 to anyone who wasn't there. Excitement for Star Wars: Episode I overshadowed all other aspects of popular culture, and it was impossible to escape the tidal wave of cheap movie merchandise. The Phantom Menace received several tie-in video games, of varying quality. Star Wars Episode I: Racer is among the best of these titles. This one was made in-house by LucasArts, and it's clear that the team gave it as much love and polish as possible. Now, over 20 years after its initial launch, this is one movie tie-in game that has actually held up rather well.

The game is extrapolated from the scene in The Phantom Menace in which young Anakin Skywalker competes in a podrace. In the solo campaign, you travel the galaxy, competing in a series of podracing tournaments as you earn money to buy better parts for your pod and invest in pit droids to keep your engines running smoothly. Alternatively, you can simply snap off your Joy-Cons and compete against a friend in a fast, angry burst of multiplayer fun.

Episode I: Racer's core gameplay is somewhat lacking. For all of Anakin's boasting, it turns out that racing a pod is actually incredibly easy – you simply hold down a trigger and steer to avoid crashing. The first few tournaments are painfully easy, but it's necessary to ace them before moving on because you need their prize money to upgrade your pod. Winning later tournaments, then, is less about racing skill, and more about point allocation as you progress through the campaign.

Where the game shines, though, is in its worldbuilding and level design. Everything is coated in a thick, rich layer of Star Wars lore. The Expanded Universe of novels, comics and games was really hitting its stride in 1999, and Episode I: Racer takes advantage of this to add depth to the game's setting. You don't *need* to know that the ice planet Ando Prime is home to an ancient tribe of monks, or that the audience at the asteroid belt in the Oovo system is mostly made up of prison inmates, but these little details go a long way toward selling the Star Wars experience.

Similarly, the game goes above and beyond in producing ever-evolving racetracks. Some racing games expect the player to complete the same course over and over, against increasingly savvy A.I. opponents. Episode I: Racer, on the other hand, has unique courses every time you visit a planet, so while the art assets may stay the same, the tracks themselves become increasingly complex and challenging. The game is filled with little surprises, which help it to stay fresh as you keep playing.

Make no mistake: This is still a 20-year-old movie tie-in that has, understandably, aged since its release. The game does feel a little clunky and antiquated. Nevertheless, with Nintendo still inexplicably hesitant about putting F-Zero games on the Switch, anyone looking to scratch their sci-fi racer itch could do worse than this. **– MATTHEW L.**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: ASPYR
DEVELOPERS: LUCASARTS & ASPYR RATING: E

Drilling Back to the Cube Era

MR. DRILLER DRILL LAND

ORIGINALLY RELEASED IN 2002, Mr. Driller Drill Land was a Japan-only game for the GameCube that has finally made its way West after all these years. While several entries in the Mr. Driller series have remained in their homeland, this one has long been considered to be the best of the bunch.

Unlike its progenitor, Dig Dug, the Mr. Driller series is fashioned a bit more like a puzzle game. You still use your drill to descend and burrow your way through the many levels of the underground spaces you'll find yourself in, but now you'll also be connecting and clearing out various colored blocks that stand in your way, all while trying to avoid being crushed by falling debris.

Within the titular theme park, you'll encounter several variations on this theme as you make your way through the five main attractions. For instance, "The Hole of Druaga" (based on Namco classic The Tower of Druaga) adds some exploration and dungeon-crawling elements, as you're actively trying to find exits from one map to another while gathering items to help you face off against bosses. "Drindy Adventure" is another variation, based on Indiana Jones' adventures in Raiders of the Lost Ark, with an emphasis on collecting golden idols and avoiding getting crushed by rolling boulders.

The different modes are fun, but can take some getting used to. While I generally preferred a slower and more methodical approach to ensure that a move I made earlier didn't come back to haunt me, blasting your way through as quickly as possible to reach the end is an equally valid – and perhaps even preferred – method of taking on the different courses.

Some might seem easier than others, at least to start. The developers have offered some assistance to the player, though you may find the quality of that help varies. In addition to a normal mode, there's also a "Casual Mode," which just adds one extra life. Not a whole ton of help in the early goings, admittedly. As you play, though, you'll also earn currency that can be spent on a variety of things, whether it's items to help you get through the various stages, or collectables ranging from cards to 3D model souvenirs.

There's a story here, too, with a very anime presentation, complete with a fully animated opening video and song – and while the text has been translated to English, the characters still speak Japanese. Multiple characters fitting various roles are along for the ride, and you'll be using different ones in most of the different attractions.

Unfortunately, you're forced to engage with the entire cast – you're only allowed to play the first stage of each attraction before being booted to go check on what the other heroes are up to. In other words, if you really like just one particular style, you're still going to have to play through the rest before you can get back to your preference.

Overall, Mr. Driller Drill Land is a challenging but fun time, boosted by great replayability. It took 18 years, but Drill Land is finally open for new guests! **– DAVID**

8.0

SWITCH PUBLISHER: BANDAI NAMCO DEVELOPERS:
BANDAI NAMCO & PROJECT DRILLER RATING: E

REVIEW CONTINUED FROM ISSUE #47

One Bone-Headed Hero
SKELATTACK

6.5

YOU COULD FIGURATIVELY throw a stone into the ocean of gaming and hit an action platformer that's trying to recreate "the olden days." That's not a dig – as someone who grew up with the NES, it's been incredible to see my generation grow up and become game designers who are paying homage to the classics. Inti Creates is a major example of a studio that does just about everything right, providing experiences that both feel new, yet, era-appropriate. Skelattack tries to straddle that line, but unfortunately comes up short in several respects.

Skelattack, in many ways, is quite the ambitious little platformer. It has to set up a semi-elaborate universe for itself and manage to deliver pinpoint platforming on top of a serviceable combat system. It's a noble goal, but it occasionally falters with really tying every facet of the project together with one neat little bow.

Let's start with the basics. Your job, as a lowly skeleton, is to become a warrior and "save the Underworld." It's cute and relatable. Skully, our hero, wouldn't feel out of place in a Saturday morning cartoon environment, and is incredibly endearing both in terms of his simple design and his in-game actions. Pairing him with Imber, his cute bat pal, is even more "daaaw-some." It's a hard premise to turn your nose up at. (If you have a nose. Skully doesn't.)

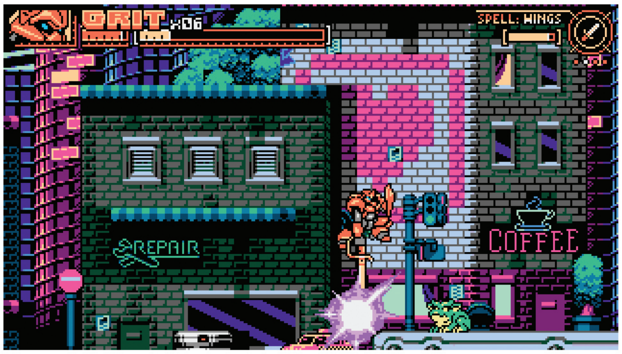
But the rest of the underworld and the game's lore isn't quite so fleshed out. I wish everyone around Skully was explored a bit more, but instead, you're kind of taken along for the ride in a cut-to-the-gist "Point A to Point B" narrative. It's a dungeon crawler at heart, but I found myself wanting to stop and really take in the world more than I could – as it stands, the small "main" village is all we really get.

Skelattack's lingering and latent issues extend to its mechanical core. While I never had any major problems controlling Skully, the wall jump system (which is a large part of the platforming) is very clunky and works counter to pretty much every other established wall jump in gaming. Frequent checkpoints will definitely cut down on the frustration factor, though, because while Skelattack isn't afraid to get tough sometimes, at its core it isn't vicious – which fits nicely with the aforementioned adorable-yet-violent aesthetic. It tries to punish you by dropping some of your currency upon death, but it's very easy to pick back up when you respawn almost directly next to your body. (Or, you know, bones.)

I think the crux of Skelattack's issues lie with a crisis of identity. Much of the game, from picking up items to fighting enemies, doesn't have a lot of weight to it. The animations look great on paper, but in practice, the world can feel repetitive and cold at times. It feels like the designers wanted to commit to a single vision but waffled between concepts on several levels.

In spite of its faults, there's a lot to love about Skelattack, and I'd definitely play a sequel. With more polish, this world would be worth revisiting. **– CHRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: KONAMI DIGITAL
DEVELOPER: UKUZA RATING: E10+



The Final Verdict
PANZER PALADIN

8.0

IN CASE YOU missed our last issue, I managed to spend a great deal of time with the PC version of Panzer Paladin, a retro-infused platformer from Tribute Games. Now, we're finally ready for the Switch verdict, and that verdict is good!

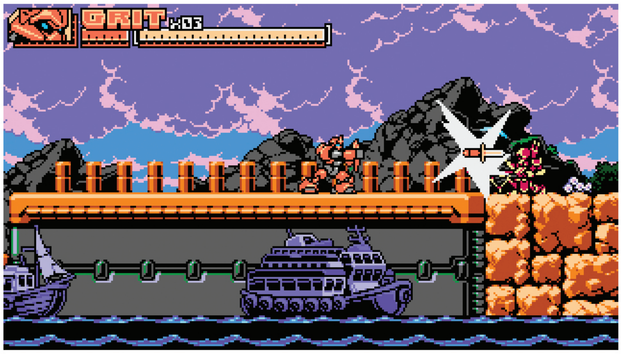
With many elements of Mega Man tucked underneath, this "select-a-stage" platformer is actually far more unique than meets the eye. Tribute Games managed to sneak in a ton of feel-good mechanical elements, most notably the weapon system. In short, players are tasked to micromanage a series of power-ups from the traditional (a sword) to the ridiculous (a hockey stick). These items are dropped from enemies or found in stages and are at the crux of what makes Panzer Paladin tick.

Your options are three-fold: You can use them at will while glancing at their durability, break them to cast powerful spells (buffs or one-off effects) or toss them into periodic checkpoints to pay for the privilege of saving your progress. This creates a huge web of options where you're using low durability weapons as spells or to pay for checkpoints, while keeping your favorite "day-to-day" weapons available for skirmishes and boss battles.

Now, when I used the word "micromanage" earlier, I meant that as a term of endearment. Although there is a degree of strategy to Panzer Paladin's retro madness, it isn't so overwhelming that you're spending time in menus like a typical RPG. Instead, it's more of a guideline – a system that you can use at a glance to get ahead the more you pick up on it.

Although some stages in Panzer Paladin can feel like a slog at times, Tribute really managed to capture old-school level-based platforming in a bottle and put their own spin on it. If you're a classic platformer fanatic waiting for a big publisher to release the next iteration of a major franchise, try this one out first. **– CHRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER:
TRIBUTE GAMES RATING: T



Alone on the Greens
GOLF WITH YOUR FRIENDS

PERHAPS MY GREATEST folly when volunteering to review Golf With Your Friends was forgetting that I have no friends with whom to golf.

Indeed, if golfing with your friends online is your primary motivation for playing Golf With Your Friends, then it may work out for you. However, at the time of this review, I have no friends with Golf With Your Friends to golf with, leaving me to attempt to pick up a quick round online. Unfortunately, if such a thing were possible, it was not as quick as the duration allowed each time I would try.

Fortunately, Golf With Your Friends does allow for offline play as well, and like the online mode purports, you can add up to 11 other people besides yourself into the mix – though the Nintendo account holder is the only one who gets to have much in the way of an on-screen identity (i.e. username, avatar, etc.). Unfortunately, no matter how many controllers you have, you're all going to have to pass around the same one (which wouldn't even be so bad on its own, except the camera remains fixed as the last player left it, which can arguably give players advantages when a turn starts you with a straight shot toward the hole).

That isn't to say that there's nothing good to Golf With Your Friends, however, just that the experience as advertised on the tin may not be there for you. As a single- and even multiplayer local experience, I found the game to be quite charming. In fact, I wasn't even in a very upbeat mood when I first played, mainly hoping to get an idea of what to expect when I sat down with it for real. But not only did it keep my attention for the full 18 holes that first time, but I was actually feeling a bit better by the end of it.

Those expecting traditional golf should probably do away with those expectations right now, though. This is mini-golf, and it doesn't even feature the traditional back-and-forth swing meter; instead, you simply aim with the right stick, adjust your power as you see fit with the left (I do wish you could use the D-Pad instead), and send the ball on its way. It actually reminds me more of some pool video games I've played. The only real issue with the controls is if you accidentally put a spin on the ball, it's nearly impossible to take off.

There are 12 courses, ranging from peaceful forests and twilight areas to a pair based on Worms and The Escapists, all providing their own unique quirks, and there are tons of options. There are various modes, too, but while Hockey is fun, Dunk (basketball) is less so, and the PC version's course editor is completely missing.

Golf With Your Friends isn't quite top caliber, and it has a few flaws and glitches, but even at its most basic, it can be a fun and even relaxing time – even if you're the only one playing.
– DAVID

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: TEAM17
DEVELOPER: BLACKLIGHT INTERACTIVE RATING: E10+

Tossing Out the Balls
WHAT THE GOLF?

A FAMILIAR SCENE lies before you. A golfer stands at the ready, club in hand, flag in the distance. You use the analog stick to aim your shot, press the A Button to power it up, and release. In a regular golf game, you would expect what follows to be a golf ball flying gracefully through the air, but this is What the Golf?, "the golf game for people who hate golf." So instead of the ball, it's the golfer who's launched into the sky!

As his hilariously animated, lifeless body flies a few more feet with every thwack, it becomes apparent that this is truly a golf game like no other. In fact, it's not really much of a golf game at all. What the Golf? can best be described as a comedic puzzle game with the loosest of all possible connections to actual golf – and it succeeds at nearly everything it tries to do.

The game takes place in some sort of facility dedicated to the idea that golf is boring and needs to be fixed. This is accomplished by a series of themed experiments that play with the most basic concepts of golf in increasingly bizarre and funny ways.

The entire game revolves around the basic mechanic of pointing and shooting an object across some sort of playfield to reach a hole . . . or rather the flag that's sticking out of the hole. Sometimes you're a ball. Sometimes you're a house. Sometimes you're a character working his way through a Super Mario-inspired platforming level.

From classic video games to cult favorite movies and just about everything in between, each area provides you with a fresh set of challenges completely unique to whatever came before. The sheer quantity of unique concepts the developers managed to come up with built around this simple premise is astounding, and listing them in any more detail here would only serve to spoil the constant surprise of what comes next.

Besides the main campaign, there are several other modes to keep you busy long-term. Daily Challenge and Impossible Challenge both feature a series of stages to finish within as few strokes as possible, complete with online leaderboards. There's also a fun multiplayer mode where up to two players compete to clear courses as quickly as they can. Each round gets the winner another unit of health for the final showdown, where both are forced to compete in a randomly selected arena-style battle against one another. It's not the deepest multiplayer experience around, but with the right company there's plenty of fun to be had.

Comedy in video games isn't always the easiest thing to get right, but What the Golf? literally made me laugh out loud many, many times. It's clever, stylish, creative, full of weird music, genuinely hysterical, challenging and exceedingly fun to play. Whether you like golf or not, What the Golf? is a hole-in-one. **– KRIS**

8.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: TRIBAND
RATING: E10+

I Know Kubfu

POKÉMON SWORD & SHIELD

EXPANSION PASS, PART 1: THE ISLE OF ARMOR

THE EVOLUTION CONTINUES. I wasn't totally blown away by what I saw in Pokémon Sword & Shield last November. I was hopeful, though, that the mainline series' transition to home consoles represented a step in the right direction – I thought elements like the Galar region's Wild Area, while lacking in polish, could be laying a foundation that future sequels could build on. What I didn't expect was that construction would resume so soon! A little over half a year later, the overall evolution of the Pokémon gameplay experience has taken another step forward thanks to DLC.

A small step. Again, I'm not really shocked or amazed by what I've seen in my time spent exploring the new Isle of Armor, but I can recognize that this is once again getting a bit closer to that ideal Pokémon journey that I hope we'll get to play some day in the future.

The Wild Area idea is what's iterated on the most here, as the entire explorable space of the Isle of Armor (located just east of the Galar mainland) is freely roamable, as the Wild Area was. But it's thankfully more complex this time! Whereas the first Wild Area was basically two big open fields dotted with a handful of lakes and puddles, a few mild elevation changes and some small variances in landscape here and there, this Isle offers greater variety in all those regards: a comparatively vast swath of ocean (filled with angry, charging Sharpedos); hills and valleys that give way to fully subterranean cave systems; and forest, swamp and desert zones that all feel distinct enough to claim those names. Again, all freely roamable, with free camera control. It's great.

The Isle is not enormous overall, but there are a few fresh ideas tossed in to make the most of the area that is available, like the hunt for hidden Digletts. 151 Alolan Digletts (with their little sprigs of hair on top) are scattered all around the island, waiting for eagle-eyed Trainers to spot them. Track down enough of these tiny wannabe Waldos and you'll score prizes from their grateful owner – mostly other Alolan Pokémon. The greatest of these is clearly the ridiculously tall living palm tree, Alolan Exeggutor, and that's because of another newly added idea that enhances exploration on the Isle: The Pokémon of your choice can once again run along behind you, freed from its Poké Ball! This feature has appeared in a few past Pokémon games, but never in a fully 3D, ground-view game like this, in which you can fully appreciate the hilarity of a towering tree monster lumbering along, hot on your heels.

All of that is window dressing, though, to support the core experience of The Isle of Armor: a new mini-sized Pokémon journey that focuses on your Trainer joining a dojo and getting partnered up with the new Fighting-type bear 'mon, Kubfu. You'll complete a few tasks before being allowed to meet and recruit Kubfu, but then the tale will transition to building a bond with the brand-new bear, training it in the ways of battle and ultimately challenging one of two towers on the island. Complete the Tower of Waters and Kubfu will evolve into a Fighting/Water-type. Climb the Tower of Darkness and your new Urshifu will be Fighting/Dark.

But this is where problems begin to creep in: Kubfu starts out at a low level, and every wild Pokémon you could challenge in order to build its strength is Level 60. *Every* Isle of Armor 'mon is Level 60. (At least, if you've completed the main game already, which is going to be the case for 99.9% of the players of this DLC.) Game Freak really dropped the ball on level balancing here, setting up a scenario in which you're meant to train a new little monster, but will

DLC PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK
RATING: E

8.0

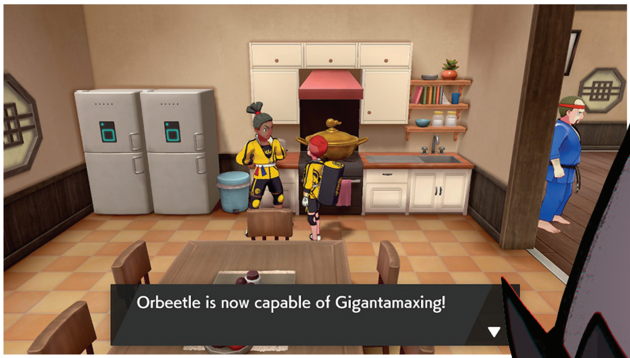
most likely end up just raising its level by feeding it XP-raising candies earned from battles fought by your old team from last November.

Another issue? Kubfu and its evolution Urshifu are it when it comes to new Pokémon on the Isle of Armor. You can also evolve Slowpoke's Galar region variant into Galarian Slowbro, but the overall Pokédex count is just bumped up by two since that's just another Gen I Kanto 'mon getting a fresh form change. (Though a great one, I will admit. Look at that dopey grin. Gotta love it.) I had hoped that the Isle would hold at least two or three more fresh species, to bring in that best feeling the Pokémon series has to offer once again: the "What in the world is THAT?" moment when you stumble into a battle with a creature you've never seen before. Alas, The Pokémon Company must have felt like they needed to spoil every fresh face in the marketing leading up to the DLC's launch. (Maybe they didn't want YouTubers or social media stealing their thunder, so they just went ahead and unveiled all their new creations themselves.)

In the end, it's fine. They did at least bring back 100 or so old 'mons that didn't previously make the cut for the Galar Dex, and I'm happy to once again have a Krookodile on my squad. But I do worry about The Crown Tundra now – have we already seen all of the new Pokémon that will be found there, as well? Even though it won't be available to explore until this November? (I'm guessing November. TPC likes to launch Poké products just before Thanksgiving, you know.)

For now, I'll give Part 2 of this Expansion Pass DLC the benefit of the doubt, as I have enjoyed Part 1 (for the most part). The Crown Tundra is already confirmed to be giving us another freely explorable Wild Area-esque overworld, and that's been the best aspect of adventuring on the Isle of Armor.

In fact . . . might this be the transition point? Has this been a test run to pave the way for full free camera control in the entirety of the inevitable Gen IX games? If that's the case, then Kubfu's quest may have quite a great lasting impact! **– LUCAS**



BY THOR THORVALDSON

SUPER MARIO BROS.

THE LEGACY OF A MASTERPIECE

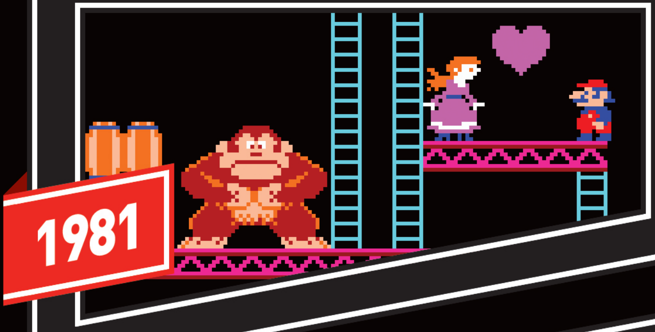
As the original Super Mario adventure turns 35 years old, we look back at its continuing impact – one year at a time!

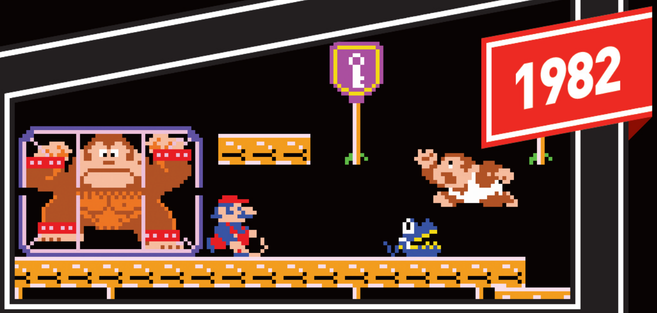
BY CHRIS CARTER, JONATHAN HOLMES, KEVIN KNEZEVIC, MATTHEW LOFFHAGEN, BRETT MARTIN, DAVID OXFORD, TONY PONCE, KRIS RANDAZZO, REBECCA RUDRANATH, MATTHEW TARANTO & LUCAS M. THOMAS

THE YEAR WAS 1981, and Nintendo was trying to market their latest arcade game, the space shooter Radar Scope, in North America. Unfortunately, it failed to catch on, leaving them with 2,000 unsold units. Nintendo of America President Minoru Arakawa wanted to find a way to repurpose those machines, which led global Nintendo President Hiroshi Yamauchi to assign designers Shigeru Miyamoto and Gunpei Yokoi to the development project. Originally, they planned on developing a game in which Popeye would save Olive Oyl from Bluto, but they were unable to obtain the license at the time. That was when Miyamoto decided to create some original characters with future marketing potential: a carpenter with an iconic hat, overalls and mustache (Jumpman), his girlfriend (Pauline) and a giant ape (Donkey Kong!).

Donkey Kong was a huge hit on both sides of the Pacific when it was first released in July. Players would make Jumpman climb to the top of construction sites, dodging obstacles like rolling barrels, bouncing blocks and fireballs, in order to reach Donkey Kong at the top and save Pauline.

But how did Jumpman become Mario? Legend has it that Mario Segale, the landlord of NOA's offices in Seattle, angrily confronted Arakawa over overdue rent. After the encounter, NOA's employees decided to give a new name to what would become one of the most famous faces in gaming!





BUOYED BY DONKEY KONG'S success, Nintendo signed an exclusive licensing deal with toy maker Coleco for them to develop home versions of the arcade game, and in 1982, Coleco released Donkey Kong as a pack-in with their flagship ColecoVision console. This was followed by ports to other consoles and home computer systems developed by companies such as Commodore and Atari.

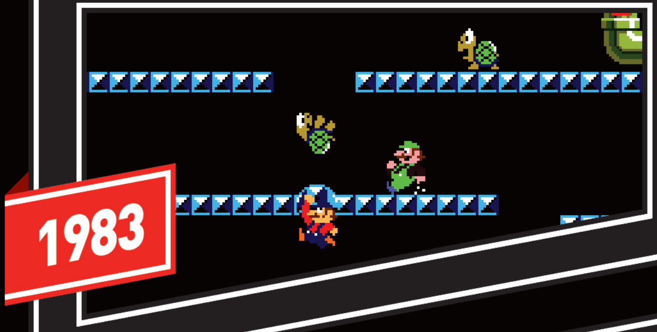
That same year, Nintendo released Donkey Kong Junior. Also developed by Miyamoto and Yokoi, the game featured D.K.'s son climbing and jumping across platforms filled with enemies in order to grab the key at the top of the screen and free his father from – gasp! – Mario, wielding an animal tamer's whip! It was the first time in his career that he'd been cast as a bad guy. (And still one of only very few villainous turns.)

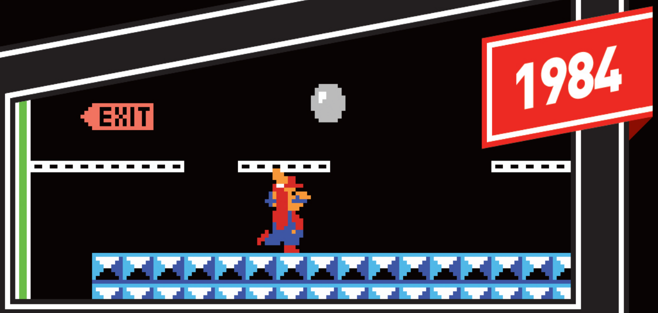
Mario's journey to the pinnacle of video game stardom would soon hit a bump in the road, however, when Universal Studios demanded a cut of Coleco's profits and sued Nintendo, claiming that Donkey Kong and its characters infringed on their intellectual property rights to the classic movie King Kong. It took a few years, but thanks to the efforts of attorney John Kirby (who'd also go on to inspire the name of a Nintendo icon), Nintendo used Universal's earlier suit against RKO Pictures to prove that King Kong was in the public domain, and cemented their foundation in video game history.

1983 MARKED A new beginning for Mario – as well as where it all started for his brother Luigi – as the two of them appeared in the platformer Mario Bros., developed once again by Miyamoto and Yokoi. Mario got more background and a career change – he was now an Italian-American plumber working in New York City – and he and Luigi were now running and jumping through subterranean sewer mazes, defeating baddies like Shellcreepers, Sidesteppers and Fighter Flies. Mario Bros. also introduced the series staples of coin collecting and the iconic green pipes.

Even though 1983 was the height of the U.S. video game crash, Mario Bros. was still a huge hit for the home market, with Atari licensed to develop ports of Mario Bros. to its family of home consoles. At the same time, on the other side of the Pacific, Nintendo released its Family Computer in Japan in July, with Donkey Kong and Donkey Kong Jr. included as its launch titles, later followed by their own port of Mario Bros.

Mario also had his first animated appearance, along with Pauline and Donkey Kong, in Ruby-Spears' Saturday Supercade. Circus workers Mario (voiced by Peter "Optimus Prime" Cullen) and Pauline spent every episode trying to catch an escaped Donkey Kong. On their merry chase, the trio would be entangled in nefarious plots that always resulted in the bad guys getting theirs while Donkey Kong got away . . . again.





THE STAGE WAS nearly set. Mario had been established as a character, and his basic actions of running, climbing, jumping over obstacles and bashing floating blocks from their undersides had made their debuts. He'd gained an extra bit of back story, as well as a brother. He'd faced off against enemy turtles for the first time, he'd gained an appreciation for gathering golden coins and he'd glanced at those big green pipes the Shellcreepers kept creeping out of . . . though he hadn't stepped inside one himself yet. The building blocks of his Super adventure were in place by the end of 1983.

. . . But it didn't happen yet. In the "calm before the storm" in-between year of 1984, Mario found himself establishing his other ongoing identity as a spin-off star! He popped up as the umpire in Tennis on the Famicom and Vs. Tennis in arcades, then held a girder aloft to act like Breakout's ball-bouncing paddle in a minigame in Pinball. Pauline appeared alongside him there, and his other original co-star joined him for both Donkey Kong Circus and Donkey Kong Hockey, two obscure portable Game & Watch games. If those names caused you to raise a quizzical eyebrow, that should be enough to confirm that they've had little lasting impact. But they do mark an important point of transition – they were the last new games to feature Mario and Donkey Kong together for nearly a decade, as both characters went their separate ways.

THIS IS IT! The moment the Super Mario story began. And the beginning of a legacy that's endured for 35 years so far!

We turned back the clock an extra four years to kick off this retrospective in the interest of providing full context for this tale, starting with Mario's first appearance as "Jumpman" and moving forward in time from there. But September 13, 1985 is the exact anniversary we're celebrating in this issue, as that was the day when Nintendo fans in Japan could first get their hands on Super Mario Bros. For them, it represented a leap in game design and established a new high-water mark of excellence for the Famicom hardware, which was then in its third year on the market. The Famicom had found success before that point, but Super Mario Bros. took it to the next level!

In America, its role was different. The NES (our equivalent to the Famicom system) had not yet arrived, so Super Mario Bros. served as a launch title that helped make a case for the console's appeal from Day 1!

. . . At least, that's the official story. The launch of the NES happened on October 18, 1985 in New York City, and some say that Super Mario Bros. was there that day, while other sources claim it didn't come along until a little later. We sadly don't know for sure just what American date to celebrate!

What we do know for sure is Super Mario Bros. was, and still is, a masterpiece. (For more, please flip to Page 56!)

1985

1986

WHILE NO ONE seems to remember precisely when Super Mario Bros. released in the United States, the NES hardware itself was only available in a few places as 1985 came to an end, so most American fans first got their chance to meet Super Mario as the system itself rolled out to more stores around the nation throughout the year of 1986.

Back in Japan, 1986 was dominated by Mario mania. Nintendo quickly capitalized on this frenzy by churning out a Famicom Disk System port, as well a remixed arcade version as part of their Nintendo Vs. System lineup. They even licensed the title to Hudson Soft, resulting in the obscure Super Mario Bros. Special for the NEC PC-8801 and Sharp X1 computers.

But those quick-and-dirty ports couldn't hold a candle to a certain bombshell that exploded onto the Famicom Disk System in June: Super Mario Bros. 2! It was longer! It was tougher! It had Warp Zones that sent you *backward!* It . . . looked just like the first game. (Well, as you're probably aware, this wasn't Super Mario Bros. 2 as Westerners would come to know it, but more on that later.)

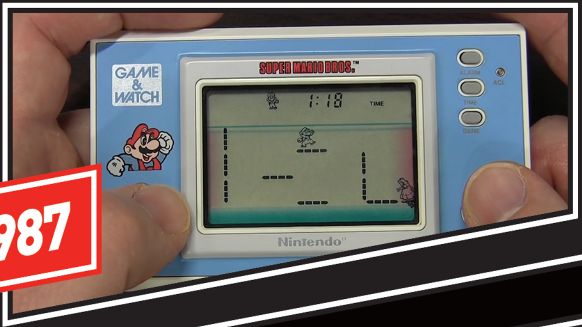
The year's last big highlight took place on Japanese silver screens. Premiering in July, Super Mario Bros.: The Great Mission to Rescue Princess Peach! was as anime adaptation of the brothers' Koopa-stomping escapades that holds the distinction of being the first movie ever based on a video game!

WHILE MARIO'S MOST famous role of 1987 might have been his job as the referee in Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!, the impact of Super Mario Bros. is more keenly felt in the stand-out release of the year: The Legend of Zelda.

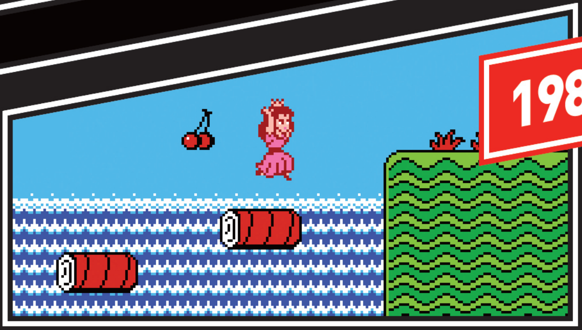
Super Mario Bros. and Zelda have been intertwined right from the start, as the dream team of Shigeru Miyamoto, Takashi Tezuka and Toshihiko Nakago spearheaded development of both iconic games *at the same time*. Work on the two games was not only simultaneous, but inseparable – many ideas that were developed for one game were instead moved across to the other if they felt like a better fit. As such, it's not a stretch to view The Legend of Zelda as being linked to Super Mario Bros.' phenomenal legacy.

The timing of the two making it to market was much closer in Japan, as Zelda went on sale there in February of 1986. So you could credit the connection to that year instead, if you prefer. In America, The Legend of Zelda launched in July of '87.

1987 also saw the release of a very different version of Super Mario Bros., as the game made its debut in handheld form. Super Mario Bros. on the Game & Watch was far less technologically complex than its NES big brother, but it paved the way for many other Mario platformers on Nintendo handhelds in the years to come, and bridged the gap between the early Game & Watch era and the 1989 launch of the Game Boy.



1987



1988

MARIO MANIA WAS officially in full swing in the States with the American release of Super Mario Bros. 2 in 1988 – but not the same Super Mario Bros. 2 that fans in Japan had been given in 1986! It was judged to be too difficult for American players. So, as an alternative, Nintendo took a different game called Yume Kōjō: Doki Doki Panic and converted it for release in America by adding Mario characters. Anyone who jumped on that first Shy Guy in the game could tell something was off! There was no satisfying stomp – the Shy Guy just kept on walking, carrying Mario away with it!

That infamous localization decision only served to expand the scope of the Super Mario series, though, as the American Super Mario Bros. 2 was welcomed into the canon, and its influence is still felt today. Mario has yet to return to its land of Sub-Con, but plenty of its characters are found in other games: Shy Guys, Ninjis, Bob-ombs, Snifits and Pokeys all got their start there, and Birdo has made many appearances as well. Peach, Toad and Luigi all continue to exhibit mannerisms that originally hail from this game too, like Peach's floaty jump and Toad's extra-speedy quickness.

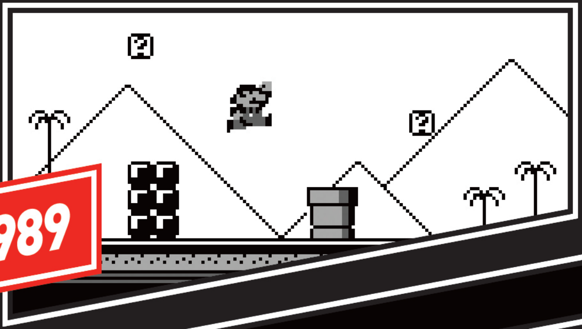
Nintendo also started licensing deals with the Mario and Zelda brands and released a flood of merchandise in 1988. Figures, lunchboxes, plushes, clothing, furniture and housewares were all emblazoned with Mario and Link! It was rad.

1989 WAS A year of bold new frontiers for Nintendo's premiere plumber. Super Mario Land brought his trademark playstyle to the Game Boy for the first time, making proper platforming on the go a reality in ways Game & Watch never could. It didn't look or even play quite the same as its NES big brother, but the important stuff remained intact. It was charming, creative and, most importantly, fun.

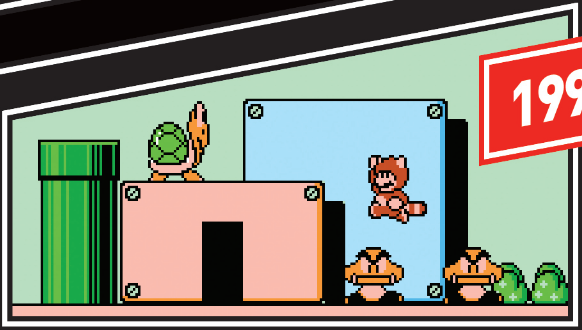
Since Mario's mythology was still taking shape, battling Bowser hadn't become a requirement just yet. Instead, Mario traveled to Sarasaland to save a new princess named Daisy from the evil alien Tatanga, using airplanes, submarines and the bouncy Superball power-up. Also, where previous Mario platformers featured music by Koji Kondo, this time around Hirokazu Tanaka lent his musical stylings, and wound up creating one of the most memorable soundtracks to ever come out of a Game Boy.

Meanwhile, Mario technically made his big screen debut in the cult classic film The Wizard, which gave American audiences an early look at the upcoming Super Mario Bros. 3 in its epic finale. Over on the small screen, kids across the country tuned in to see Captain Lou Albano voice the plumber in The Super Mario Bros. Super Show! five days a week, and in the non-digital world, toy company Applause released another series of memorable Super Mario figurines and plushes!

1989



1990



THE WIZARD TEASED us. The other games hyped us up. For the kids of the '80s, nothing was quite like the release of Super Mario Bros. 3 in the second month of the '90s. The game was huge, challenging and inarguably the most ambitious NES game to date from Nintendo!

Mario could now fly by grabbing the new Super Leaf power-up to transform into Raccoon Mario, then swinging his tail to propel him through the sky. He could also don suits, like the Frog Suit for swifter swimming, the Tanooki Suit for all the Raccoon powers plus access to an invulnerable statue form, and the Hammer Bros. Suit, which let our hero hurl hammers and defeat enemies that previously seemed invincible. And he had a fireproof shell!

On the schoolyard, kids would talk about Giant Land, Warp Whistles, the airships of World 8 and more memorable moments. Then there were the Koopalings! Larry, Morton Jr., Wendy, Iggy, Roy, Lemmy and Ludwig terrorized Mario in each world with their own looks and – thanks to the Adventures of Super Mario Bros. 3 cartoon – their own personalities.

This was also the year that hosted the Nintendo World Championships, a tour and tournament that hit several U.S. cities and challenged kids with Super Mario Bros., Rad Racer and Tetris. The goal was to race through the first two quickly to make it to Tetris, then earn as high of a score as possible!

"NOW YOU'RE PLAYING with power . . . Super power!"

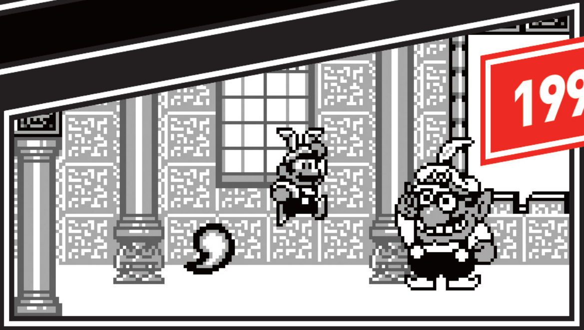
What happens when you take something that's already super, such as Super Mario Bros., and make it even *more* super? You get Super Mario World, the official "Super Mario Bros. 4" and the flagship launch title for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System! Now the Bros could get Feathers that allowed them to fly with a cape like Superman, giving them enough super power to break the game clean in half. They were also joined by a new ally, the Super Dragon, Yoshi, who could give enemies a proper tongue-lashing of a different kind, and had power-ups of his own whenever he chomped down on differently colored Koopa shells. All this across a super-sized map that spanned from the furthest and darkest reaches of Dinosaur Land to the stars and even beyond, culminating in a super showdown atop Bowser's neon castle!

That wasn't all for Super Mario in 1991, though. The partnership between Nintendo and DiC came to a close with Captain N and the New Super Mario World, lasting all of 13 animated episodes. Mario also returned to the links in 8-bit one more time with NES Open Tournament Golf, and even dipped his toe into the growing PC market with Super Mario Bros. Print World and the digital coloring book, Super Mario Bros. & Friends: When I Grow Up.

So, how was 1991 for Mario? Super, thanks for asking!

1991

1992



BY THE TIME 1992 rolled around, the NES faithful had received Super Mario Bros. 3 and the new SNES generation had been launched with Super Mario World at the helm. It was time for Nintendo's designers to turn their attention back to their portable line and produce a new Game Boy title.

Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins arrived, and at a black-and-white glance, it bore more of a resemblance to Super Mario World than to its predecessor. Upon returning from Sarasaland, Mario discovered that an old friend from his childhood wasn't so friendly anymore, as Wario had decided to take over the plumbing protagonist's castle at the heart of Mario Land.

While the look was fresher, the action still hewed more closely to Super Mario Bros. than World – or even Land, for that matter. Mario ran, jumped, grew with Super Mushrooms, flung fireballs thanks to Fire Flowers and plowed through foes with Starmen. No planes or subs here, and the only new power-up was the Carrot that turned him into Bunny Mario, who didn't fly, but instead could glide thanks to the long ears now protruding from his hat.

Also in 1992? He got artistic with Mario Paint, baked Yoshi's Cookie, got his own Super Mario Bros. pinball machine, found himself Missing on MS-DOS and was off to the races in Super Mario Kart, all while his cartoons ran reruns on TV.

1993 WOULD PROVE to be an all-star year for Mario, thanks to the release of Super Mario All-Stars for the Super NES – four 8-bit classics (one of which had never been released outside of Japan prior), each enhanced with 16-bit graphics, sound and battery back-up saves, all on a single Game Pak!

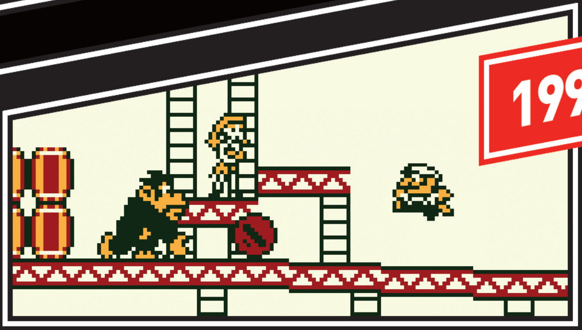
The unreleased game was Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels, known better to Power Players in Japan as their Super Mario Bros. 2. This fiendishly difficult update of the original Super Mario Bros.' style of play was deemed "For Super Players," and had its sharp edges rounded slightly for this release, but not *too* much. While given a much more generous save feature than the other three titles, it was still tough enough for Nintendo Power to offer special patches to anyone who could show they reached World 9 – which meant no warping!

Super Mario Bros.' other all-star effort in '93 didn't make the desired splash, however, as Bob Hoskins, John Leguizamo and Dennis Hopper brought a big-screen adaptation of the game to live action in theaters around the world.

As Mario wielded a Super Scope-inspired Devo Gun in the film, so too would he take up the SNES' light bazooka to blast all manner of Koopa critters in Yoshi's Safari. He also got educational with Mario is Missing on SNES and NES, as well as Mario's Time Machine on MS-DOS and SNES.

1993

1994



WITH THE WAFT of financial failure from the Super Mario Bros. movie still in the air, it looked like Mario's reign as the world's #1 video game mascot might be in jeopardy. He had plenty of titles released in 1994, but they were all attempts to milk his good name with software that didn't really deserve him. We're talking about games like Mario Teaches Typing, Mario's Early Years! Fun with Letters/Numbers/Preschool and, of course, Hotel Mario. (More on that one on Page 58.)

Meanwhile, Mario's '90s nemesis Wario started blowing up in a major way. He starred in a crossover with Bomberman, beguiled Toad in Wario's Woods and took over Mario's handheld franchise in Super Mario Land 3: Wario Land. Then, out of the blue, Mario's original archenemy Donkey Kong snagged the spotlight with Donkey Kong Country, the third best selling SNES game of all time. Developed by Rare, it was a drastic departure from Miyamoto's vision for the series.

Perhaps in a call for traditional D.K. values, Mr. Miyamoto released his own Donkey Kong game (starring Mario, of course) on the Game Boy that same year. Dubbed Donkey Kong '94, it's now considered one of the best in the series – and it rekindled the original rivalry that had launched both characters' careers!

In the midst of all these conflicts between Mario and his foes, Yoshi was still stuffing his face with cookies. Though not too far off on the horizon, an island was calling to him . . .

IN 1995, NEARLY every Mario fan was talking about the same thing: Yoshi's Island.

It was the game that made the screaming Baby Mario a star, and allowed us to really take the reins of Yoshi in a way that Yoshi (1992) and Yoshi's Cookie never accounted for. With impeccable level design, memorable bosses and a smooth egg-throwing mechanic, it cemented itself as one of the most beloved Mario platformers of all time. And just as Wario Land had been Super Mario Land 3, this origin point of an all-new spin-off series was also officially a mainline Mario sequel: Super Mario World 2! (It was easy to miss, though it was right there on the box.) So the legacy of Super Mario Bros. officially includes the entirety of the Wario and Yoshi franchises too!

Another huge milestone was reached in 1995: Mario ushered in two new Virtual Boy launch games! (OK, "huge" might be an overstatement in hindsight, but the Virtual Boy was a major focus for Nintendo at the time, and despite its failure to find a large audience, it deserves to live on in the annals of gaming history.) Mario Clash was a fun little re-creation of the arcade classic Mario Bros. with added 3D depth, and Mario's Tennis (not to be confused with Mario Tennis, which would debut five years later) was a very early Nintendo sports classic.

To top off '95, Mario's Picross also helped propel the Picross series forward. It still lives to this day, too! It was a good year.

1995

1996

A PARADIGM SHIFT! Is 1996's Super Mario 64 the most pure Mario experience of all time? There's a strong argument for it. There's nearly no fat to be found in this utterly memorable platformer, filled to the brim with charm and great puzzles to solve. The music, the visuals (which still hold up under scrutiny), the sounds – all of it informed Mario's design for years to come.

Moreover, Super Mario 64's trailblazing work in three-dimensional worldbuilding and camera control revolutionized 3D platformer design. Just as Super Mario Bros. established a foundational template for 2D platforming designs to follow, so too did Super Mario 64 do the same for 3D run-and-jump adventures. Its own legacy is incredible!

And yet, it was not the only standout Super Mario game of this same year. Somehow, someway, Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars gave it a run for its money!

Super Mario RPG is filled with one of the most original and greatest casts in a Mario game, juxtaposed neatly with a fun battle system and ingenious platforming mechanics. Square made sure to honor Mario's past with that platforming focus, and in so doing established yet another origin point for not one, but *two* more long-running spin-off series: Paper Mario and Mario & Luigi!

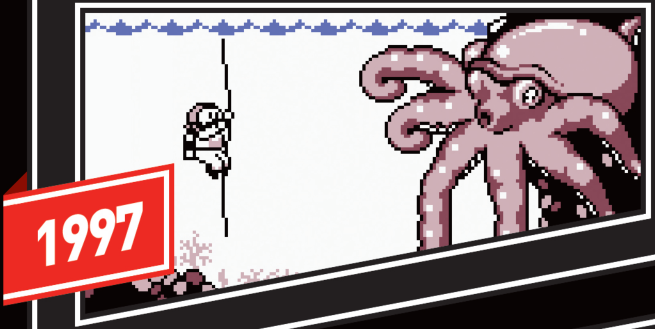
Truly, 1996 was one of the greatest Super Mario years.

THE RELEASE OF Super Mario 64 was such a tectonic plate-shifting moment in video game history in 1996 that its aftershocks continued to reverberate throughout 1997. The game made its way to Europe to launch the N64 hardware there in March, and then a few months later it had a re-launch in Japan – Nintendo made a new version of the game that supported the Rumble Pak! (Hey, how come we never got that here?)

The limited N64 software library in America ensured that nearly every new owner of the system in 1997 grabbed a copy of Mario's debut 3D platformer, keeping its sales steady all the way through a second holiday season. Racing up in the support position was our hero's biggest spin-off of the year, Mario Kart 64! (In fact, by the end of the system's life, those two titles would still be the #1 and #2 bestsellers, respectively.)

Mario Kart 64 dropped the "Super" from the front of its name, and it's never returned. The Kart series has gone on to become the most successful of all the Super Mario spin-offs, so it's certainly earned its own identity by this point!

Finally, a somewhat under-the-radar hit from '97: Game & Watch Gallery. This was the beginning of another new series – one that reached back into the past and revived game designs originally made for Nintendo's early LCD handhelds. No encore for Donkey Kong Hockey, unfortunately, but Mario did star in remakes of Manhole, Oil Panic, Fire and Octopus.



THINGS GOT WEIRD for the plumber in 1998. While Link was working overtime (and working his way *through* time), Mario mostly took it easy. But while there were no major adventures for Nintendo's main man this year, his few appearances were noteworthy due to how quirky they were.

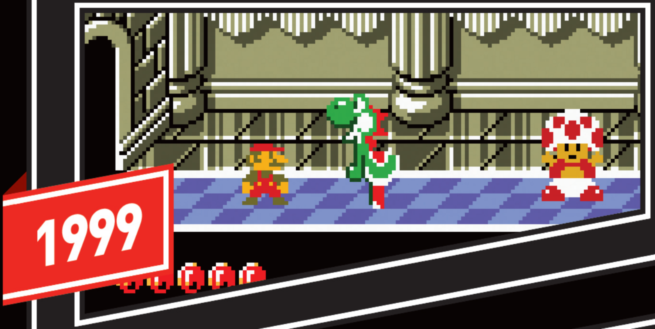
For instance, the unusual PC 1995 educational title, Mario's Game Gallery, got a reissue and a new title for '98: Mario's FUNdamentals. Perhaps so it wouldn't be confused with Game & Watch Gallery, which received a sequel this year consisting of six more classic games: Parachute, Helmet, Chef, Vermin, Ball and the G&W version of Donkey Kong.

And on the note of new versions of semi-obscure Nintendo games, the fun NES action/puzzler Wrecking Crew got a Japan-only sequel on the Super Famicom! That sentence reads like the result of some sort of Nintendo-themed Mad Libs, but isn't half as strange as another unlocalized Mario game of '98: Mario no Photopi. This N64 title wasn't a traditional game so much as a creativity program where you could edit and animate images uploaded from special cards that slide in through a pair of slots in the top of the cartridge; it's one of the most obscure Mario games for sure. But if you're looking for a more traditional Mario-like experience from this year, both Yoshi's Story and Wario Land II may scratch that platforming itch!

HAVE YOU EVER stopped and thought, "What if Super Mario Bros., but more?" Well, the folks at Nintendo did back in 1999, and the result was Super Mario Bros. Deluxe for the Game Boy Color.

Now on a portable platform, this version of the original Super Mario Bros. was enhanced in myriad ways. In addition to being able to play through the entire game as either Mario or Luigi (no second player required!), Deluxe upped the ante by adding in eight of the 13 worlds from The Lost Levels, maps of each world, extra animations, a mode that challenges players to find Red Coins and Yoshi Eggs, a Vs. Mode race against another player, a race against increasingly faster Boos, a whole host of Toy Box bonus features and even unlockable images that could be printed on stickers with the Game Boy Printer! Though hindered by the lower screen resolution of the GBC hardware, it's still one of the most definitive versions of the game that launched Mario into superstardom.

That wasn't the only thing Mario had going on before the turn of the century, however. 1999 was the year of the Mario sub-series, with Mario Golf on both the Nintendo 64 and Game Boy Color, Mario Party for the N64, a third Game & Watch Gallery for GBC, Japan's Mario Artist: Paint Studio for 64DD and a starring role alongside Luigi, Yoshi and Donkey Kong in a little game called Super Smash Bros. for the N64.



THE BIG N may have spent most of 2000 prepping for the launch of the Nintendo 64's successor, but that didn't mean ol' Jumpman was going to bid farewell to the fifth generation without a bang!

Enter Paper Mario, the Intelligent Systems-developed quasi-sequel to Super Mario RPG! It may have been a more straightforward affair compared to Square's 16-bit triumph, but fans nonetheless heaped praises upon its humor and colorful cast – who knew that literal two-dimensional cutouts could have so much depth? We also bore witness to the effect that Mario's stardom has had on the eternal understudy – Luigi's diary painted a portrait of a man mired in self pity while his much more talented older brother embarked upon grand adventures. So sad . . . but also kinda hilarious!

Paper Mario may have enriched Mario's world in a way his traditional platforming romps couldn't, but Mario Tennis would be the one to challenge the series' very foundation. How could an addictive yet simple sports spin-off leave such a profound impression? What about this summer spectacle could so wildly challenge players' perceptions of reality and fantasy?

Two words: "Waluigi Time!"

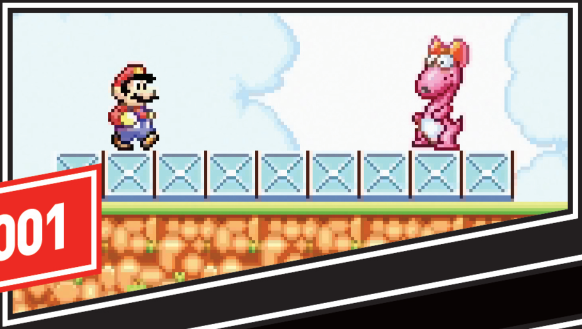
Yes, this year marks the 35th anniversary of Super Mario Bros., but also the 20th birthday of truly the most important spin-off character it's ever inspired. Waaaaaahhh!!!

MARIO MADNESS RETURNED in 2001 with a host of new titles starring our favorite pasta-pounding plumbing protagonist. It's difficult to pick any one as the single standout, but for the purposes of this piece, Super Mario Advance would prove to be an oft-overlooked attraction.

Super Mario Advance was more than just a Game Boy Advance port of the 16-bit version of Super Mario Bros. 2, but almost like a remaster designed to show off what the GBA could do. In addition to new effects, voices, a new boss and a variety of collectables adding replay value, the gameplay was overhauled to feel more like a traditional Mario game than ever before. While not the full-blown follow-up to Super Mario Bros. 2 many of us have hoped for, it does provide enough freshness to make it more than worthwhile to re-experience this classic again. (Oh, and there's a remake of the original arcade Mario Bros., too!)

Other Mario releases this year included Paper Mario (we just gave 2000 credit for that one, but its American release wasn't until February 2001), Dr. Mario 64, Mario Party 3, Mario Tennis on Game Boy Color and fellow GBA launch title Mario Kart: Super Circuit, while Bowser, Peach and Dr. Mario joined in the fighting fun in Super Smash Bros. Melee on GameCube.

And for good measure, we got Luigi's Mansion, Wario Land 4 and a port of Donkey Kong Country for Game Boy Color.



2001

2002

HOW DO YOU follow up a game as genre-defining as Super Mario 64? In 2002, Nintendo blessed the world with Super Mario Sunshine, one of the most memorable and colorful games to grace the GameCube.

It's clear to see how Nintendo was experimenting with the possibilities of 3D platforming. Equipped with F.L.U.D.D., Mario's moveset is dramatically different in this game than in all other games in his series. Abilities such as shooting water and hovering in the air are clear attempts to overcome the awkward difficulty of leaping and targeting enemies in a 3D space.

While there's no denying that Super Mario 64 is a timeless classic, the leap forward to the GameCube era in terms of visual storytelling and worldbuilding is astounding. For the first time, the series featured cutscenes and an attempt at a plot that plays out in-game, rather than in a hasty line of text in the manual. Mario feels *alive.*

Sunshine has a narrative arc, plot twists and character development. It feels like a cartoon come to life, in the way that Mario games of the past always hinted at, but were unable to fully realize. To this day, it remains one of the most unique, charming and engaging titles in the entire Mario canon.

Throw in GBA ports of Super Mario World and Yoshi's Island, and it's safe to say that 2002 was one of Mario's best years!

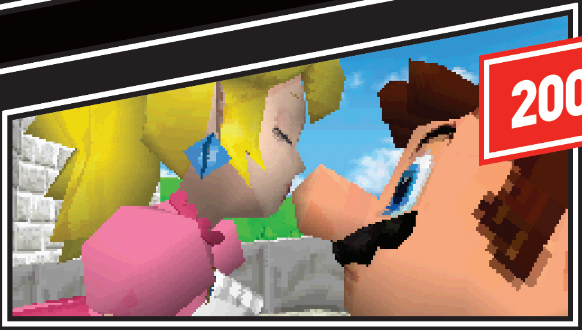
IN THE WAKE of Super Mario Sunshine, Nintendo's mascot spent the next year dashing between half a dozen other projects. He also forged new friendships and rivalries as his universe grew and he shared the spotlight with others.

This year gave the Western world Mario Party 5, Mario Kart: Double Dash and Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour. All great games in their own right, and significant for giving players the opportunity to get to know Mario's many friends, as well as meet Toadette for the very first time. Super Mario Bros. gameplay also made a small cameo in WarioWare, Inc., a game that can trace its legacy right back to the Super Mario Land games, even if things took an unusual turn along the way.

Super Mario Bros.' influence over 2003's games is far less distorted in Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, the third attempt to meld classic Mario platforming with the role-playing genre (after Super Mario RPG and Paper Mario). More than any other game in the legacy to this point, it spotlighted the "brothers" piece of Super Mario Bros. by making the twins equal partners.

What's more, Super Mario Bros. 3 made its way onto the Game Boy Advance, completing the Super Mario Advance quadrilogy. While it's a shame the GBA never got its own original Super Mario platformer, some games never go out of style, and for those with a Nintendo eReader at their disposal, Super Mario Advance 4 provided some neat new surprises.

2003



2004

THE HOT NEW arrival in 2004 was the Nintendo DS, a dramatic departure from the simple handheld design that had made the Game Boy a success. To truly prove just how much of a leap forward the DS was, one of the launch titles was none other than Super Mario 64 DS, an enhanced port of the original N64 classic.

Where the Super Mario Advance series had mostly been straightforward ports of classic SNES titles, Nintendo pulled out all the stops for Super Mario 64's DS remaster. Mario was joined by Luigi, Yoshi and Wario, all of whom are playable, and there are dozens of new stars to be found scattered throughout Peach's castle and its connected levels.

As great as that might be, Nintendo struggled with the physical limitations of the Nintendo DS. Controlling 3D Mario on a D-Pad is not exactly easy, so to get around this, the game's controls were dramatically reworked to incorporate touchscreen input. But even with three control options, movement never felt as intuitive as using the N64 controller.

Meanwhile, on GameCube, players got Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door, Mario Party 6 and Mario Power Tennis. The GBA Mario library expanded again with Mario Pinball Land, Mario Golf: Advance Tour, Mario vs. Donkey Kong (a reboot of the original rivalry!) and a cartridge re-release of Super Mario Bros. itself, as part of the Classic NES Series.

2005

MARIO DIDN'T HAVE any platforming adventures once again this year, so he turned back to sports to keep himself busy. In addition to furthering his tennis career on the Game Boy Advance in Mario Tennis: Power Tour, over on the GameCube he laced up his soccer cleats in Super Mario Strikers, stepped into the batter's box in Mario Superstar Baseball, took a temp job with Electronic Arts to make guest appearances in NBA Street V3 and SSX on Tour, and showed off his sweet dance moves in Konami's bizarre yet entertaining Dance Dance Revolution: Mario Mix. (You haven't lived until you've seen Waluigi in a dance-off).

But if there's one sport that Mario is best known for, it's racing, and this was a massive year for Mario Kart. Sales juggernaut Mario Kart DS brought the franchise online for the first time, while the Namco-developed Mario Kart: Arcade GP provided a unique take on the series, complete with a sit-down cabinet, all-new courses and items, and playable Namco characters, including Mario's old arcade rival Pac-Man.

Rounding things out, the memorable Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time released for the Nintendo DS, forcing the Bros to team up with their baby selves – but even with all those sports and time paradoxes, he still found time to party down in Mario Party 7 for the GameCube and the franchise's first portable iteration, Mario Party Advance. How does he do it?

2006

ALTHOUGH THE DS launched alongside a remake of Super Mario 64, the handheld wouldn't receive its first new Mario platformer until May 2006, when New Super Mario Bros. arrived. The game marked a pivotal moment for the series: Not only was it the plumber's first new 2D sidescroller in over a decade, it would also be one of his best-selling outings ever.

As its retro-styled logo signified, New Super Mario Bros. was not a follow-up to Super Mario World, but rather a modern take on Mario's classic adventures. The game deliberately harkened back to the more straightforward platforming of the series' NES installments, although it featured plenty of its own secrets to uncover, from hidden exits to deviously hidden Star Coins.

Despite not radically pushing the series forward, New Super Mario Bros. would be an unqualified success. The game would go on to sell more than 30,000,000 copies over the DS' lifetime, making it the handheld's best-selling title by a huge margin and eventually spawning a handful of sequels on other Nintendo systems.

That was hardly Mario's only outing in 2006. After conquering golf and tennis, Mario and friends headed back to the court in Mario Hoops 3-on-3. Mario vs. Donkey Kong 2: March of the Minis also arrived on the dual-screen handheld that year, and the plumber made another appearance in baby form in Yoshi's Island DS, a direct follow-up to the SNES classic.

2007

WHILE 2006 REINTRODUCED Mario to his 2D roots, 2007 took him where no plumber has gone before: the cold reaches of space! Super Mario Galaxy, the first new 3D Mario game since Sunshine, arrived on Wii nearly one year after the system's launch, and it marked yet another watershed moment for the ongoing and ever-growing Super Mario series.

Although Galaxy built upon the foundation laid down by Mario 64, the game charted some daring new territory for the franchise, eschewing the sandbox-style levels of its predecessors for more linear platforming challenges. Despite their linearity, each stage was dripping with creativity; some constructed themselves in mid-air as Mario leapt between platforms, while others would twist and turn like an M.C. Escher painting.

Galaxy would be a big critical and commercial success. The title earned rave reviews and would go on to sell more than 12,000,000 copies, making it the best-selling 3D Mario game (until it was eventually dethroned by Super Mario Odyssey).

Also in 2007, April saw the release of Super Paper Mario, while Mario Strikers Charged and Mario Party 8 both followed in May. And this was the first year Mario crossed over with longtime rival Sonic, settling their differences at the Olympic Games, of all places, and starting a tradition of sports competition that continues to this day.

2008

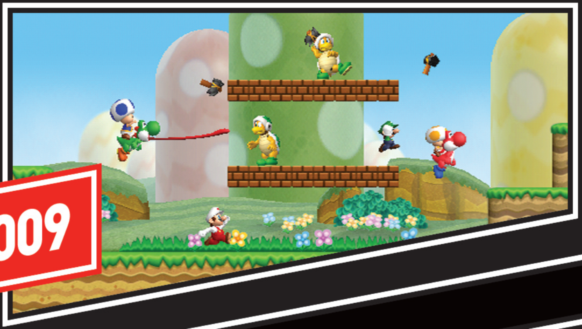
RIDING HIGH OFF his return to form with Super Mario Galaxy, Mario used that goodwill to promote multiple different genres. He returned to the baseball field in Super Mario Sluggers, hit the racetracks with Mario Kart Wii (a title that would go on to be one of his all-time biggest hits) and ran an extra lap of Olympic competition against his 16-bit rival in Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games for the DS.

That wasn't the only time he'd face off against the fleet-footed hedgehog in 2008, though. Super Smash Bros. Brawl pitted a darker, frownier, more heavily textured Mario against Sonic, Solid Snake and a host of others in a bout of fisticuffs that would make for the most massive and muscular crossover the world had ever seen. With its Subspace Emissary adventure mode, the game also marked Mario's first foray into 2D co-op platforming, a genre that would soon prove to be his most popular yet.

In hindsight, giving Mario a co-op sidescrolling adventure seems like an obviously good idea, especially in the wake of the success of his 2D quest on DS. But fans at this time were conflicted about whether the Super Mario series should again embrace that old-school approach, or stick with the solo-play, free-roaming 3D worlds that defined much of mid-'00s gaming. As it turned out, though, Nintendo didn't consider the situation to be a debate of one against the other . . .

IF YOU'RE A fan of 2D Super Mario, this year really had it all, from digital calculators to massive multiplayer adventures. The ill-fated DSiWare storefront saw the release of Mario Clock, Mario Calculator, Dr. Mario Express and an honest-to-goodness game called Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Minis March Again!. Along with 2008's Dr. Mario Online RX, these apps are some of the first (and only) download-exclusive Mario titles ever released. This was also the year that the Wii got its first motion-controlled port of one of Mario's GameCube titles (New Play Control! Mario Power Tennis) and the first "opportunity" Mario and Luigi ever received to enter the body of their biggest foe to help him to battle internal invaders (Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story).

All that would have been more than enough to mark 2009 as an overall great year for our overall-wearing heroes, but they were just getting warmed up! With the launch of New Super Mario Bros. Wii, the brothers (and their two Toad companions) officially brought four-player, 2D platformers to the mainstream, offering up a blueprint that would be followed again in Super Mario 3D World, New Super Mario Bros. U and Super Mario Maker 2. It's easy to take for granted now, but at the time, adorning Mario in a penguin suit and allowing him to pick up and throw his brother into a pit was nothing short of revolutionary!



2009

2010

ACROSS ALL THESE years, there are many candidates for consideration to be named the "all-time greatest Super Mario game." That would be an extremely competitive debate, but 2010's Super Mario Galaxy 2 would surely land near the top.

As a step up from its predecessor in nearly every way, Galaxy 2 felt like a test bed for a lot of ideas Nintendo had been cooking up, unleashed all at once. The stage select system felt deliciously old-school, and it also introduced us to the Cloud Flower – one of the greatest power-ups in all of Mario history – that allowed players to effortlessly create platforms on a whim and encouraged exploration.

It also might make the best case yet for how incredible Nintendo is at pushing their own hardware to the brink. When Galaxy 2 came out, it looked absolutely gorgeous – to the point where it was outshining other games on platforms that were technically more powerful. It's a testament to the fact that Nintendo will always be wizards at optimizing and drawing the most out of their own systems. Any way you shake it (ha), Galaxy 2 remains a fan favorite for a reason.

2010 didn't let up though, as we also got Super Mario All-Stars 25th Anniversary Edition (which barely made the cut-off for this year's entry with its December release). In true Nintendo fashion, however, it was sold via a limited printing, which made it into quite the collector's item.

THE 3DS DIDN'T get off to a great start, but in 2011, Mario kicked off an incredible turnaround for the system with not one, but two great games.

First up was Super Mario 3D Land, a phenomenally well-made middle ground for fans of 2D and 3D Mario. It wasn't the sprawling, exploratory fare found in games like Super Mario 64, but it wasn't just running straight to the flagpole like New Super Mario Bros. either. 3D Land was the best of both worlds, giving Mario yet another completely unique playstyle to work with, and bringing a perfect blend of nostalgia and newness to the table. What's more, its brilliant use of the 3DS' signature stereoscopic 3D proved that technology's appeal.

One month later, Nintendo released Mario Kart 7, the first game in the series to drop the subtitles in favor of slapping a big red number at the end. It continued the innovations in that franchise by letting the racers take flight! (Or take glide?) The allure of a brand-new, well-polished Mario Kart game on the go was too much for players to ignore, and it went on to be another undeniable success.

Outside of that, Mario once again teamed up with his long-time rival in Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games, then met up with some new friends in Fortune Street, a Monopoly-esque board game for the GameCube featuring characters from both the Mario and Dragon Quest universes.

2011

2012

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. marked the first time in more than a decade that Mario starred in a new 2D platformer, but fans wouldn't need to wait more than a few months between the two new "New" games Nintendo released in 2012!

First up, in August, was New Super Mario Bros. 2 for 3DS. NSMB2 didn't radically diverge from its 2006 predecessor, but it did introduce some new elements to the mix, including the beloved Super Leaf from SMB3. The game was also a money grab – quite literally! Mario's overarching goal was to collect 1,000,000 coins, and every stage was rife with them; coins would rain out of pipes and Lakitu clouds, and one power-up even transformed enemies and bricks into more moolah!

New Super Mario Bros. U followed in November on the debuting Wii U, and it built upon the competitive/cooperative aspect of New Super Mario Bros. Wii, allowing up to four players to help – or hinder – one another as they navigated stages. There were new power-ups like the Super Acorn as well, and it was the first 2D Mario game since World to feature an interconnected world map.

Beyond that, 2012 also saw the release of Paper Mario: Sticker Star, Mario hit the tennis court again in Mario Tennis Open, he continued his Olympic rivalry with Sonic in a second trip to the London Games (on the 3DS) and he partied it up in Mario Party 9 – phew! Yet another busy year!

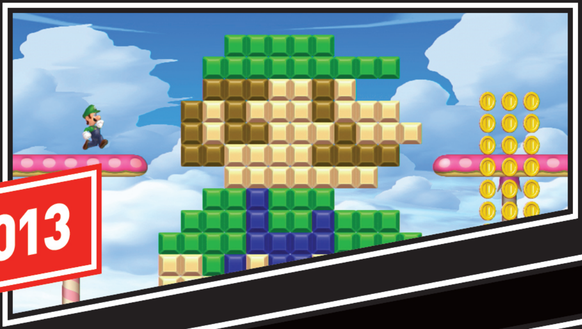
2013

LUIGI DEBUTED IN 1983's Mario Bros., so to commemorate his 30th anniversary in 2013, Nintendo finally gave Green 'Stache the respect he deserves with an entire "Year of Luigi" celebration! We're talking merchandise, cross-software photo-bombs, headlining roles . . . the works! You wanted a 3DS XL dotted with dozens of Luigi silhouettes? Wish granted!

Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon, the long-awaited sequel to the GameCube launch title, landed on 3DS in March. Then in June, New Super Mario Bros. U scored a Mario-less DLC campaign called New Super Luigi U. And later in the summer, Mario & Luigi: Dream Team dove into our birthday boy's subconscious and presented an entire army of Luigis to command.

Finally, Super Mario 3D World arrived in November. The Wii U follow-up to Super Mario 3D Land brought back the squad of Mario, Luigi, Peach and Toad from Super Mario Bros. 2, while also introducing beloved power-ups like the Super Bell that transformed our heroes into adorable felines. Add in the ability to play cooperatively with three friends, and you've got a glittering jewel to cap off the year.

Still, Luigi couldn't stand that Mario would take top billing during *his* year, so he stuck a bunch of hidden Luigis throughout the levels that popped up when you least expected! I knew the guy was bitter, but who would've thought he'd resort to petty vandalism?



2014

SUPER SMASH BROS. has always put the fighting first and foremost, but the series also has paid homage to the "Bros." aspect of its title in every release as well. Not just by including Luigi each time, but also by having a platforming-style stage playable somewhere in the game. Super Smash Bros. for 3DS and Wii U didn't have the massive adventure modes or target breaking of some past games, but they did include the large, quirky map of Smash Run and the endgame platforming challenge of Master Fortress, respectively.

Besides headlining the biggest fighter on the 3DS and Wii U, Mario raced over – and under – all sorts of dynamic new tracks in Mario Kart 8 and hit the portable links in Mario Golf: World Tour. Meanwhile, spin-off series got their own highlights, as Mario's dino pal tossed oversized eggs in Yoshi's New Island, Donkey Kong kept it cool in the exemplary Tropical Freeze and Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker solved miniature mazes in the Mario world. It marked the origin of yet another Super Mario Bros. spin-off, since it got its start in the Captain Toad minigames featured in Super Mario 3D World!

If that wasn't enough, the Year of Luigi spilled over into 2014 with Super Luigi Bros., a new port of the original SMB that cast Luigi as the primary hero and mirrored all the classic courses to force players to fight their muscle memory and run from right to left! It was included in the Wii U's NES Remix 2.

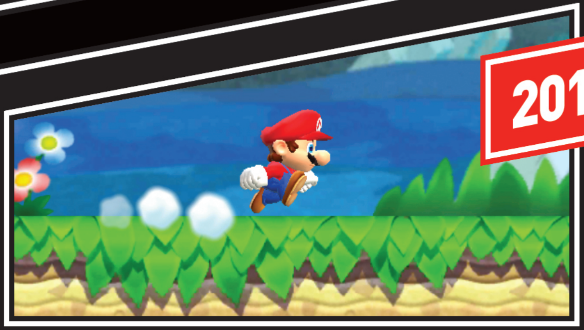
2015

MARIO JUST LOVES celebrations, and I'm not just talking about 2015's Mario Party (10, for those keeping track). Five years ago, Nintendo celebrated Mario's 30th anniversary with a major milestone of its own: Super Mario Maker for Wii U! And in retrospect, while no one saw it coming, it really made perfect sense – the New Super Mario Bros. sub-series had run its course, and what was once novel had become routine for players. So why not shift the creativity over to them?

And *what* creativity! While the potential wasn't quite limitless – and there was a fair bit of trudging through nonsensical, unfair stages, to be sure – the imaginative courses whipped up by players practically redefined what a Mario game could be. Nonlinear item-based exploration, working calculators, logic puzzles, narrative-driven horror stories and elaborate, stage-wide boss battles were just a few of the wild new ideas on display. And they could all be experienced in four different flavors of nostalgia: Mario 1, 3, World and New.

Super Mario Maker was a milestone worthy of 30 years, but there were quite a few non-platforming releases in '15 as well that also continued to carry the SMB torch forward: Wii U sports title Mario Tennis: Ultra Smash; 3DS RPG mash-up Mario & Luigi: Paper Jam; 3DS puzzlers Dr. Mario: Miracle Cure and Puzzle & Dragons: Super Mario Bros. Edition; and the Wii U/3DS action/puzzler Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Tipping Stars.

2016



HOW DOES MARIO manage to keep that pot belly after all these years, anyway? The poor guy has participated in every sport under the sun, repeatedly competed in the Olympics, and, as of 2016, starred in a game that's all about running constantly!

Questions about the plumber's metabolism aside, Super Mario Run was the first game in the series to release on smartphones, and as a result, its gameplay was simplified a bit from the usual adventure. Rather than being able to stop and smell the Fire Flowers, Mario instead dashed forward automatically while players controlled his jumping in an effort to grab goodies and bop baddies. He didn't go it alone, though, with not just Luigi but Peach, Toad, Yoshi, Toadette and Daisy all being playable as well. As a mobile release, Super Mario Run was accepted only warily by long-time fans, but it's an undeniably important piece of the Super Mario Bros. legacy now.

When he wasn't hot-footing it across your phone screen, Mario kept active in Mario & Sonic at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games for 3DS, Wii U and even the arcade. And he still had time to cut loose in Mario Party: Star Rush (3DS) and mess with toys in Mini Mario & Friends: amiibo Challenge (3DS and Wii U)! I guess all that hard work and exercise paid off, though, since by the end of the year, he was looking quite trim (or even flat?) in the vibrant, divisive Paper Mario: Color Splash.

2017 WAS YET another pivotal year for our hero. That March, Nintendo ushered in its new handheld/home console hybrid, the Switch. Mario was once again conspicuously missing from the system's launch lineup, but he arrived a few months later to help propel it through its first holiday season.

Super Mario Odyssey, the plumber's latest 3D adventure, released in October 2017, and it was an immediate success. Hearkening back to Super Mario 64, the game featured sprawling, sandbox-style levels rife with collectables. Mario's quest took him across multiple kingdoms in a hat-shaped airship called the Odyssey, and to fuel it, he needed to collect Power Moons. Fortunately, these were everywhere – more than 900 were in the game, and much of the fun stemmed from poking around and finding Moons where you least expected.

Aiding Mario on his adventure was Cappy, who inhabited our hero's hat and gave him the ability to "capture" nearly any enemy he encountered. The game put this power to good use; some stages required Mario to inhabit a Bullet Bill and fly to a far-off platform, while others had him take over a realistically rendered Tyrannosaurus Rex for a wall-breaking rampage!

It was a boundlessly creative title, and it would go on to be one of the system's most popular. To date, Odyssey has sold more than 18,000,000 copies, eclipsing Galaxy to become the Super Mario series' best-selling 3D adventure. Hats off!

2017

2018

THE ADVENTURE OF Odyssey extended into this year with a few free DLC updates – the most prominent addition was Luigi being brought into the game, reuniting the Super Brothers once again. He wasn't made playable, though – rather, he was cast as the host of a balloon-hunting minigame.

Mario Tennis Aces arrived as a welcome upgrade to the little-liked Ultra Smash on Wii U, and Super Mario Party hit with even more praise. Rumors also began to spark about a new, animated Super Mario movie, and that was made official when the film studio Illumination – known for Despicable Me, Minions and The Secret Life of Pets – was revealed to be working on the project. While we still know next to nothing about it, it was this year that we started imagining what it might become, while celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Hollywood movie that already was.

Super Smash Bros. Ultimate also released this year, bringing the total number of characters from Super Mario Bros. to nine with the addition of the quirky and oddly effective Piranha Plant. It became the first "common" foe to earn a roster spot in the Smash series, and once again honored the original 1985 classic, since that's the game that first introduced them!

Finally, Dark House debuted the Super Mario Encyclopedia, a compendium that encompasses the first 30 years of Mario's career. Check it out for a more detailed chronology!

WE'RE JUST ABOUT to wrap up this retrospective . . . but Mario isn't done presenting heavy hitters yet! 2019 made a strong case for being one of the Super series' most significant years as well, as it brought to the world major Mario event releases like Super Mario Maker 2!

An enhanced, expanded and even more engaging sequel to the "make your own Mario levels" virtual construction kit we first got on the Wii U, Maker 2 introduced highly requested features like slopes on the building side of things, then beefed up the single-player appeal with a new solo story mode, and finally upgraded multiplayer to allow up to four people to link up over the Internet and either work together or fight against one another on the way to millions of user-placed flagpoles.

New Super Mario Bros. U also got its Deluxe encore in 2019, giving that adventure another shot at the spotlight – both the timing of its launch (just a few months after New Super Mario Bros. 2) and its original hardware (the low-selling Wii U) did it no favors the first time around. But on Switch, it's soared higher than a flying squirrel!

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story also got an encore (but that one didn't go so well); Dr. Mario World and Mario Kart Tour both arrived on mobile platforms; Mario and Sonic headed to Tokyo for another Olympics (still weird to say right now); and Luigi got another ghostbusting gig in Luigi's Mansion 3.

2019

2020

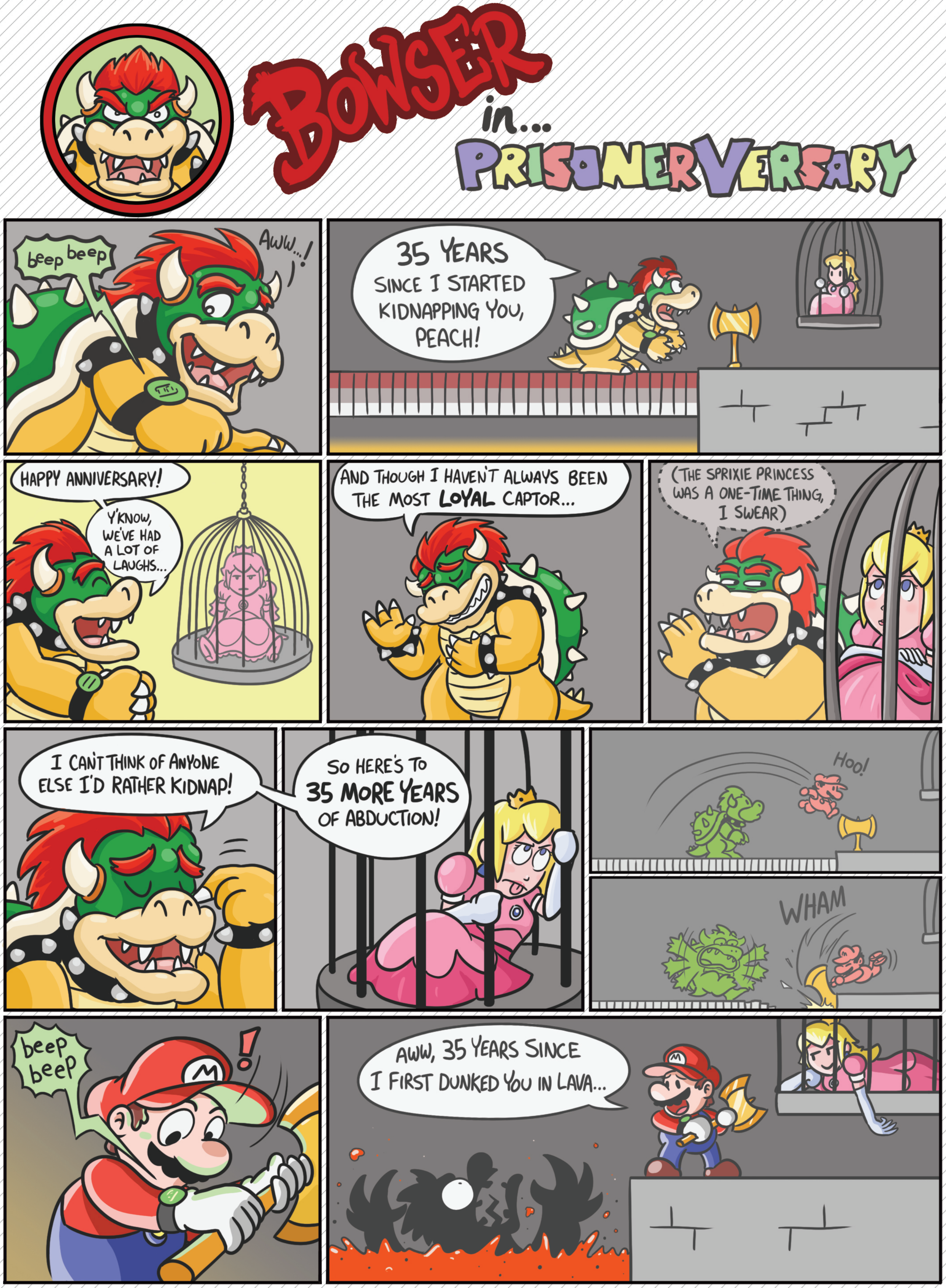
AND SO WE have arrived at the here and now. 2020 is still in progress as we're presenting this issue, and we're hopeful that Nintendo still has a few Super Mario surprises in store before the calendar flips into 2021. That said, we can at least reflect on the Super Mario Bros. impact that we've seen in this year so far.

The LEGO Super Mario toy line is a big deal. LEGO has been a major toy maker for decades, stretching all the way back into the years even before Shigeru Miyamoto was born – the simple building blocks have been so successful that Nintendo even tried to make their own version back in the '60s! This team-up has been a highly requested one for a long time, and the fact that it's finally happened is kind of like older brother LEGO recognizing that the "young kid" Super Mario is ready for the big time.

Paper Mario: The Origami King also works to demonstrate the ongoing health of the many Super Mario Bros. spin-offs. For all of the dozens of off-shoot games the Super Mario series has inspired, it's amazing how many have been able to establish themselves with their own identities and create legacies of their own. It's an incredibly diverse family tree at this point, held strong by the roots of that great first adventure, all the way back in 1985.

Now let's hope for a strong end to 2020, shall we?

Super Mario Bros. has truly achieved an incredible legacy – unmatched by any other video game in terms of lasting influence and the sheer volume of spin-off series that can be traced back to that classic adventure in 1985! Where will the Super Mario saga go next? Wherever it is, it's sure to be Super!



BY MATTHEW TARANTO

SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD DELUXE

Unconfirmed, but rumored to be revealed soon.

OVER A THIRD of a decade after the launch of the Switch, I'm honestly surprised. This game should have gotten its encore appearance long ago! In a time when "It'd be perfect on the Switch!" has been run into the ground as a comment directed toward nearly every game in existence, the sentiment is undeniably true here. Super Mario 3D World should have already brought its four-pal multiplayer to the Big N's newest hardware.

Just picture it! This game's push for four-player co-op just makes sense when you think about a couch full of four friends, each with a Joy-Con in hand. My goodness, even the debut trailer that introduced the Switch hardware to the world implied the existence of that kind of scenario for the Mario series, but it didn't come to pass until New Super Mario Bros. U got its Deluxe redo.

Well, now it's time for a true Super Mario masterpiece to have its second shot at the spotlight. While unfortunately not 100% confirmed as of this writing, Super Mario 3D World Deluxe has been rigorously rumored to be heading our way soon. With the 35th anniversary of Super Mario Bros. on September 13, it just makes sense that such a re-release would be in the cards to serve as part of the celebration. It's likely it would have been an E3 reveal before, you know, everything hit the fan this year.

We only lightly touched on this game's greatness in the big retrospective feature that just wrapped up, because we knew we'd have more space to praise it here! Super Mario 3D World expertly wove together multiple strands of the series' evolution since its origins in '85. It offered linear levels that conclude with either reaching a flagpole or fighting a boss, just like Super Mario Bros. It made four different characters playable, all with their own strengths and weaknesses, just like Super Mario Bros. 2. It championed cooperative/competitive multiplayer for up to four people, just like New Super Mario Bros. Wii and U. And it presented everything in 3D – not with free camera control as in 64 or Sunshine, to be fair, but carrying forward the 3D level design style of Super Mario 3D Land instead. At its launch in 2013, it was the culmination of all things Mario up to that point.

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPERS: NINTENDO EAD TOKYO & 1-UP STUDIO RELEASE: TBA? RATING: E

SCREENSHOTS FROM SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD FOR Wii U

So how can it catch lightning in a bottle for a second time in 2020? It shouldn't be too difficult – and prior ports from Wii U to Switch give us plenty of clues as to which tricks Nintendo will try.

How about a new playable character? Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze got its New Funky Mode when it hit the Switch, and New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe added both Toadette and her Super Crown-activated alter ego, Peachette. It's almost a given that a relaunch of Super Mario 3D World would introduce another new ally.

But who could it be? A bit of a spoiler here, but Rosalina was already unlockable as a fifth option in the original version. There are still lots of great options after her, though. Yoshi? His flutter jumps and ability to eat enemies could set him apart . . . but he might not be able to use power-ups like the Cat Suit, since he's never been able to use the same power-ups as his human pals in past games. Daisy? She made her playable platforming debut in Super Mario Run on mobile a while back, and her unique double jump skill would translate well. Toadette? They could just use Toad's same collision data. That would be easy.

Of course, the correct answer would obviously be Waluigi! Not a joke – Nintendo's had a couple of years since noting the fan outrage at his uninclusion in the playable Smash cast two summers ago, and they could play the playable Waluigi card at any time to give a guaranteed major social media boost to any upcoming game. I'd prefer he join Smash still, but I'd accept seeing him transform into Cat Waluigi and scamper around in this game with his gangly limbs flailing akimbo as a glorious silver medal.

Beyond the potential for a new hero, what else could change? Some levels will need to be altered from the original to take into account that the Wii U GamePad and its touchscreen will not be available on the Switch, but Nintendo already brought Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker over successfully, so that's a minor issue. Maybe we could get some new levels? Or how about a "switch" mechanic that lets you change your playable character on the fly? That'd be perfectly on the nose for a Switch port, and make practical sense in this game too.

It's all still speculation. For now! This all may be moot tomorrow. Who can say in this wild year? **— LUCAS**

TIMING NOTICE!

THE THREE SCENARIOS

As everyone living through 2020 is well aware, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has altered nearly every aspect of human society, and the normal flow of video game reveals and releases has been caught up in that chaos. And as a result of *that,* our ability to offer an accurate look at future games here in the magazine has been impacted. Normally Nintendo does a good job of letting everyone know what their upcoming games are going to be, and when they're going to go on sale – but we're being met instead with long stretches of silence in this season, and we're simply going to have to do the best we can!

Case in point: Super Mario 3D World Deluxe. This game has been heavily rumored to exist. And even aside from recent industry insiders saying it's on its way soon, it would still be an easy game to predict, since Nintendo has produced so many Switch ports of Wii U titles over the last three and a half years. This is one of only a handful remaining, still waiting to get the Deluxe treatment. But, as we go to press with this issue, it's still not 100% confirmed.

That leaves us with three scenarios. 1) We send this issue off to be printed, and the game gets confirmed sometime in the in-between days before physical copies arrive in subscribers' mailboxes. 2) The game gets confirmed, but not until sometime after this issue reaches all of you. 3) The game is never confirmed, and the rumors are wrong.

The first scenario would be unfortunate timing, but just part of the practical reality of printing and mailing physical magazine issues. I hope you'll all be understanding if that's how things play out. Scenario 2 would be ideal from our publishing perspective, but a bit more of a bummer in the short term. And Scenario 3 would be a bummer all around, since Super Mario 3D World is a great game that absolutely deserves to come to the Switch.

Whatever happens, I apologize. Not for things beyond our control, no, but for the garishness of the color scheme I selected for this sidebar.

SUPER MARIO 3D REMASTERS

More rumors! Are Super Mario 64, Sunshine and Galaxy coming back?

WE'RE INKING MORE uncertainty into permanent print here in the middle of August 2020, as appearing hand-in-hand with Super Mario 3D World Deluxe on recent rumor lists is a set of remasters for older 3D Mario adventures! But this possibility is even more nebulous than the previous one – it's pretty easy to envision what a Deluxe release of Super Mario 3D World would be like, but bringing older 3D Mario games to the Switch is a prospect compounded by a few more problems. Let's tackle the titles one at a time!

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO?
RELEASE: TBA? RATING: E

A SECOND ENCORE FOR 64?

The game that fully catapulted the video game industry into the 3D era may be on the horizon once again . . . but Super Mario 64 has already been re-released once before! As we just covered a few pages ago in the Legacy retrospective, the game first launched on the N64 in 1996, then got revived as Super Mario 64 DS eight years later (and there was that Rumble Pak re-do in Japan in '97 as well). Several Big N hits over the years have received remakes, but we've never really seen *second* remakes of the same games that have already been remade once. It's got my brain mixed up just thinking about it! But we seem to be entering that era of Nintendo history.

A straightforward Nintendo Switch remake of Super Mario 64, as it first appeared, would seem to be a simple proposition. The recent Super Mario Odyssey could be used as a foundation since Mario's movement in 3D space is already pretty much perfect there – he'd be missing his Cappy moves, but perhaps his other techniques could remain intact? Odyssey did include (spoiler warning!) some direct throw-back content referencing Super Mario 64 in particular, so remaking that first three-dimensional quest has surely been on those developers' minds for years.

But what about the Super Mario 64 DS content? In that version, Yoshi was the main character to begin with, and Mario had to be rescued before he could be used by the player. It was a nifty twist at the time, back when only eight years had passed since the game first came out. But now, 24 years after the fact? I don't think that would make sense any more.

I'd still love to see Yoshi playable, as well as Luigi and Wario. But maybe they could be unlockable after the main quest concluded, rather than woven into the story as they were on DS? Again, it's a tricky situation to deal with. I'm interested to see the solution Nintendo chooses.

RETURNING TO ISLE DELFINO

A second appearance by Super Mario Sunshine is easier to picture. It's only ever been available on the GameCube, so a remake would be easier to make – a visual overhaul that expands the screen into a 16:9 ratio is all it would really need at a minimum. But beyond that, there are plenty of quality-of-life improvements that could be made to the game.

TIMING NOTICE AGAIN!
MORE SCENARIOS

Oh, hey! Intentionally ugly, eye-scorchingly annoying sidebar again. Though this time I'm sparing you a second appearance by sentient timepiece T.T., so things are looking up in that regard!

As with Super Mario 3D World Deluxe, it's possible that these remasters could be confirmed by Nintendo shortly after we hit the final "Submit" and lock the content of this issue for all time. Rumblings about a new Direct are always swirling, the process of printing takes time and, well, the pair of the pandemic and politics is currently combining to ensure not-so-swift deliveries to our subscribers even once our issues are mailed out. Ain't 2020 just grand?

Still, years down the road, I like that we'll be able to look back on this time and have these tangible reminders of how uncertain things were at this time. I'll take some solace in that.

Scenarios for these games! 1) All three are revealed soon, and they're confirmed to be sold in a set together with a name like Super Mario All-Stars 3D. 2) All three are revealed soon, but they're each sold separately. 3) They aren't revealed soon, but still come out in the future. 4) Only one or two of them get revealed, leaving us to wonder about the other(s). 5) Nothing! Again, the rumors are proven wrong!

Speedrunners could be thrown a bone by making cutscenes skippable – Sunshine was more cinematic than prior Mario games, but those scenes lose their appeal when you're trying to play the game for a 50th time and you're still forced to watch Mario get wrongfully arrested and tossed in jail. Sunshine also never got alternate playable characters as 64 did on DS and Galaxy had by default, so maybe Luigi could come along on the island vacation this time too? He's spent enough time in dark, dreary ghost-filled manors. Let's let the little bro have some fun in the sun!

There is one control issue Nintendo will need to address: The Switch lacks the pressure-sensitive L and R triggers that the GameCube controller had. The water flow from F.L.U.D.D. may be more difficult to manage as a result. Not a major problem, but still tricky.

SO NOW HE'S BACK, IN OUTER SPACE

Finally, the loudest rumor making the rounds suggests that it's a trio of titles making the transition, and that the third and final one would be Super Mario Galaxy. But would Nintendo leave Super Mario Galaxy 2 out in the cold? If they're porting the first, they may as well port the second too, right?

Well, let's just focus on Mario's first trip to space for now. As the most recent of these rumored games, Super Mario Galaxy would seem to be positioned the best for a Switch port. Its original visuals from 2007 would likely be just fine if re-presented as-is today, just with an HD resolution bump.

In fact, such a version of the game already exists! Exclusively in China, an HD version of Super Mario Galaxy has been available on the Nvidia Shield console for the last few years. It looks gorgeous, and it very likely represents the kind of video presentation we can expect from a Galaxy Switch release – especially since, under the hood, the Switch and the Nvidia Shield are very similar.

But there's a problem! That Shield release of Galaxy has clunky controls.

Super Mario Galaxy was very much made to be a Wii game very specifically, and that means it had a whole lot of Wii Remote motion control integration. Some things are easily swappable – for example, the hand-shaking motion players used to make Mario execute his new Crash Bandicoot-like spin attack can just be remapped to a face button with no trouble.

But other elements are more baked in: There are some sequences in which Mario was maneuvered by pointing the Wiimote at the screen to highlight floating targets. And even aside from those moments, Galaxy always kept a small star-shaped cursor on the screen to use to gather Star Bits. You would sweep the cursor around using Wii Remote motions to pick up the Bits, then further use it to line up shots that fired the Bits back out to stun enemies or feed hungry Lumas.

The Shield release is clunky since it has no good solution for mimicking these actions with its traditional controller. It maps those functions to its right analog stick, which only kinda/sorta works – and that probably is an indication that playing Super Mario Galaxy on the Switch with a Pro Controller would be a chore.

Thankfully, there's another option: the little-used IR pointer that's built into the Joy-Con (R). Nintendo loves to create interesting new hardware and then hardly ever use its most innovative features, but if they actually remember that it's available, a control scheme in which you'd hold two Joy-Cons separately in your left and right hands would probably work to mimic the old Wiimote & Nunchuk combo pretty well.

As for extra content? I'd say Galaxy wouldn't really need any. I'd ask for more levels, but they gave us those in the form of Galaxy 2!

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

So there are plenty of mysteries still surrounding these rumored remasters. If these games do reappear on the Switch, I'll cross my fingers and hope that each one ends up being its game's true definitive version! **– LUCAS**

PIKMIN 3 DELUXE

The long-rumored Switch port of the Pikmin series' Wii U masterpiece is finally confirmed!

THE ANNOUNCEMENT WE'VE been anticipating for years has finally arrived: The Pikmin series is coming to Switch!

. . . Though that anticipation has been altered somewhat over the years. Let's present a short timeline!

2013: Pikmin 3 is released for the Wii U. It's incredible. One of the best games for that platform by far, and in our review published seven years ago in NF Issue #5, I gave it a 9.5 review score. I loved it.

2015: Less than two years later, at E3, Shigeru Miyamoto casually brings up Pikmin 4 in an interview. He says the new sequel is very near to being finished. All of us Pikmin fans are thrilled, and we begin looking forward to that game's official announcement.

2017: The Nintendo Switch debuts. Pikmin 4 has had nothing more said about it, and in the meanwhile Wii U games like Mario Kart 8 are showing back up on Switch with encore appearances using the "Deluxe" subtitle and boasting added content.

2018: Nothing.

2019: Nothing.

2020: We're officially past half a decade since Mr. Miyamoto's offhand mention of Pikmin 4, and most fans figured at some point along the way that it just wasn't going to materialize any time soon. At least, not until the third game got its inevitable encore first! We pushed pause on our hopes for Pikmin 4 and began waiting for this reveal instead.

And so, at long last, here it is. Pikmin 3 Deluxe is finally confirmed! And while many will now shift their daydreaming back to dwelling on the possibility of Pikmin 4 arriving in its wake, no one should miss the masterpiece that's being placed right in front of our eyes once more. Pikmin 3 is a superb adventure!

The game places you in control of a trio of captain characters: Alph, Brittany and Charlie, all of whom can command multicolored legions of the series' signature plant soldiers, the Pikmin. These heroes hail from the planet Koppai, a world currently suffering from famine. They've arrived on the Pikmin homeworld to track down fruits that they can bring home to their hungry fellow citizens (as well as the seeds within them, in hopes of cultivating new crops on Koppai directly).

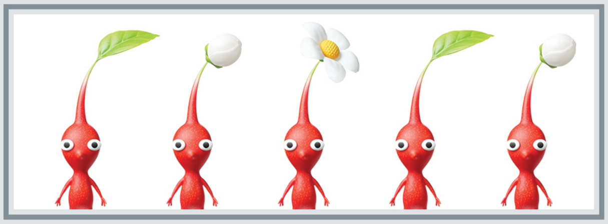
Unfortunately, the other wildlife on planet PNF-404 isn't as willing to be helpful in this endeavor! You'll have to battle for your lunch by sending your fighting Pikmin forces into the fray.

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: OCTOBER 30, 2020 RATING: E10+

THE FIVE PRIMARY VARIETIES

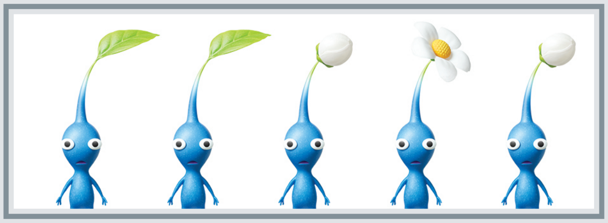
A PIKMIN SPECIES PRIMER

While Pikmin 2's White and Purple Pikmin do appear in Mission Mode, the main story of Pikmin 3 centers on these five types. Get to know them all!



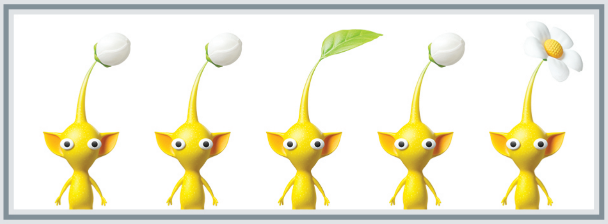
RED PIKMIN

The first form you'll find is also the fiercest fighter! Red Pikmin have sharp, pointy noses that help them poke their foes and deal more damage than other Pikmin types. They're also fully fireproof! They're unburnable!



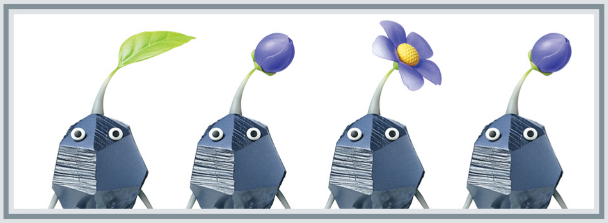
BLUE PIKMIN

Their Red cousins' power to walk through flames unscathed is impressive, but on a planet with as much water as PNF-404, being able to swim and survive in rivers and lakes is key. That's where Blue Pikmin come in!



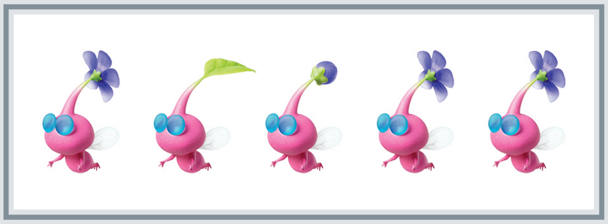
YELLOW PIKMIN

And offering elemental balance to the fire-resistant Reds and waterproof Blues are the Yellows, who laugh at electricity! They can't be shocked, and their large ears also help them soar higher through the air when thrown.



ROCK PIKMIN

Here come the heavy hitters! Rock Pikmin were introduced to the series for the first time in Pikmin 3, taking over the powerhouse position from the cast-aside Purple Pikmin. Their hard bodies can shatter strong foes' defenses!



WINGED PIKMIN

Finally, the dainty pink-colored Winged Pikmin aren't the soldiers to turn to if you want to take down enemies, but their unique power of flight is invaluable for collecting items that all the other grounded Pikmin just can't reach.

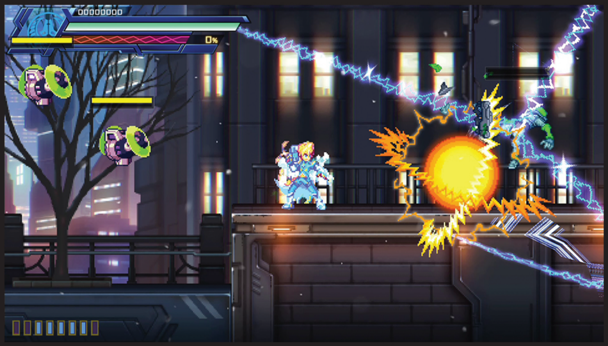
Commanding squads of up to 100 tiny individual Pikmin at a time can be tricky, but Pikmin 3 excelled at army management on the Wii U by offering the helpful Wii U GamePad as a second screen to support the view on the TV, as well as Wii Remote pointer controls for accuracy in aiming at enemies' weak points in the middle of chaotic combat scenes. Without access to either one of those pieces of older tech, this new Switch edition of the same game will surely feel and play quite a bit different.

To compensate, Pikmin 3 Deluxe is introducing new features that are intriguing and exciting – like full story mode co-op! You could previously play with two players in side modes, but now the entirety of the main campaign will be able to be challenged as a duo. Back when I reviewed Pikmin 3 on the Wii U, I praised it for offering a wild multitasking spectacle that forced me to split my brain three ways and keep track of what Alph, Brittany and Charlie were all up to with their separate squads in three different corners of the map. That should still be the dynamic of solo play, but it will be great to have the option of bringing in a human ally to split that split.

Beyond a new way to experience the same story seen on Wii U, there will also be all-new story content! Original series hero Captain Olimar and his sidekick Louie played a small role in the events of Pikmin 3 seven years ago, but now they're getting to have some more time in the spotlight with special Side Stories that give us further insight into what they were up to on PNF-404 before the Koppai trio arrived. And after they've left! There's apparently going to be an epilogue chapter in addition to the new prologue!

Need even more of the "Deluxe" treatment? The Piklopedia will be back, giving us funny research entries written from all five heroes' perspectives on each different kind of enemy that's encountered along the way. New difficulty modes will be included, for those who want to ramp up the challenge for a tougher time, or for newcomers who'd like some assistance in getting their footing for the first time. And all the DLC of the original will be included, of course.

All in all, it seems like Pikmin 3 Deluxe is set up to perfectly reintroduce this series . . . *and finally pave the way for Pikmin 4?!?!?* **– LUCAS**



AZURE STRIKER GUNVOLT 3

Lightning strikes thrice.

WHEN IT WAS first announced at BitSummit in early 2014, I never could have predicted that Azure Striker Gunvolt would become a long-running, now six-year strong franchise. The inaugural Azure title begat Mighty Gunvolt, which led to Mighty Gunvolt Burst, an Azure Striker sequel and a spin-off. Now the main series is coming back for thirds!

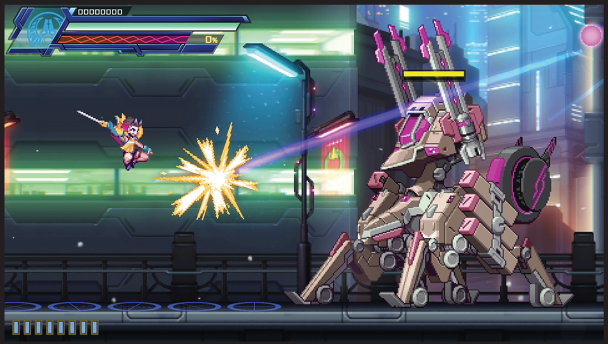
Azure Striker Gunvolt 3 was once again revealed at BitSummit this year, and Inti Creates is looking to shake up a few things to keep this action platformer saga fresh. First up, while Gunvolt himself is set to return, Kirin – a formidable shrine maiden who utilizes a sword and magic-like abilities – is going to step into the spotlight too.

Gunvolt is also due for some tweaks, which come in the form of new burst lock-ons and a Mighty No. 9-like dash system that marks enemies as you speed through them. Kirin will serve as a stark contrast to Gunvolt's high-flying ranged style, as she'll be a melee-based character not unlike Zero in the Mega Man X series.

It's become increasingly clear that Inti Creates cares deeply about this series. Director Yoshihisa Tsuda has gone on record noting that he doesn't want Azure Striker Gunvolt to become stale, so he really took his time to come up with new ideas for the three-quel (taking a slight sabbatical to give us that aforementioned spin-off, Luminous Avenger iX).

It's no surprise that the studio cares that much, though, as Inti Creates continues to deliver hit after hit. It's all really coming together for the developer (and now publisher)! Now all we have to do is wait for Azure Striker Gunvolt 3 to arrive! **– CHRIS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: INTI CREATES RELEASE: TBA
RATING: T



WWE 2K BATTLEGROUNDS

Your favorite Superstars have an all-new style.

THERE ARE GENERALLY two types of WWE games. The first are the more realistic "simulation" types that have fallen into the habit of being released annually; the other are more cartoony, over-the-top fighting game action types that are usually released a bit more sporadically.

Soon, the Nintendo Switch WWE Universe will be getting a game in the style of the latter category. Following in the footsteps of WWF WrestleMania: The Arcade Game and WWE All Stars (while not being directly related to either) is WWE 2K Battlegrounds, a title headed by industry veteran Patrick Gilmore that promises over-the-top arcade action with an all-new exaggerated and somewhat cartoonish art style.

The roster features more than 70 characters to choose from, including modern Superstars such as Roman Reigns, Becky Lynch, Asuka, Daniel Bryan and The Fiend, as well as Legends like Shawn Michaels, The Undertaker, Sgt. Slaughter, Andre the Giant, John Cena and Stone Cold Steve Austin. They'll wage war throughout eight different battlegrounds, from gator-infested swamps to auto shops and even military bases, while Mauro Ranallo and Jerry "The King" Lawler call all the action.

Several game modes await, including your standard exhibition and online matches, as well as the online King of the Battleground gauntlet match and a campaign wherein you'll take a created character on a journey to earn a WWE contract. You'll be able to customize characters and arenas elsewhere in the game, too. **– DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: TAKE-TWO INT.
DEVELOPER: SABER INT.
RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 18, 2020
RATING: T

BALAN WONDERWORLD

Square Enix summons the spirit of Sonic!

BACK IN 1990, Yuji Naka and Naoto Oshima (along with Hirokazu Yasuhara and others) first came together to change the video game industry when they created Sonic the Hedgehog.

Over the years, the duo have worked together on numerous other landmark titles for Sega, such as NiGHTS: Into Dreams, Burning Rangers and Sonic Adventure. In 1999, however, they parted ways as Oshima went on to found his own company, Artoon, where he would act in various capacities to oversee titles such as Blinx: The Time Sweeper and Blue Dragon, as well as work with Nintendo on Yoshi Topsy-Turvy, Yoshi's Island DS and FlingSmash. He would then go on to found Arzest, which helped produce Yoshi's New Island and Hey! Pikmin.

Naka would follow a slightly similar path some years later, as he departed Sonic Team and Sega in 2006 to found Prope, who created Let's Tap, Ivy the Kiwi? and the Wii version of Rodea the Sky Soldier. He too would work with Nintendo, creating StreetPass titles such as Monster Manor, Ultimate Angler and Feed Mii. This run came to an end in 2018 with the news that he had signed on with none other than Square Enix.

Little news followed, except in September 2019, when he revealed that he was working on an original action game for the home of Final Fantasy. But what could it be?

This past July, we finally got our answer: after 20 years since their last collaboration, director Yuji Naka would be teaming up once again with character designer Naoto Oshima under a new banner, Balan Company, to bring a game named Balan Wonderworld to all major platforms next year!

In the role of either 15-year-old Leo Craig or Emma Cole, players will be led by a mysterious maestro known as Balan through a magical theater and into Wonderworld, a strange and whimsical land where happiness and positive memories mix with worries and negativity (sort of like social media, really). On this adventure, the duo will be tasked with restoring balance to the hearts and minds of Wonderworld's citizens and bringing happiness back to the land.

To accomplish this, though, Leo and Emma won't be running at top speeds, curling into balls or flying through the air with the greatest of ease – well, not under their own power, anyway. Rather, they'll find a wardrobe's worth of more than 80 costumes that not only change their appearances, but also grant them extraordinary abilities that will allow them to overcome any obstacles they find in their way. You may or may not be able to fly (time will tell), but you can still walk through the air – and while supersonic speed may or may not be achievable, freezing time is nearly as good, right?

Of course, there has to be a reason the Wonderworlders need help in the first place. There's this one fellow named Lance who traps those who visit Wonderworld within their own hearts, creating monsters from the negativity that results. Whether he's the chief muckety-muck or not, he still looks like prime rival material for Balan in the tradition of Knuckles, Shadow or Reala.

To find out everything, players must venture through 12 different stories, where memories and sights of the real world are mixed with that which people hold dear. Players will have to delve into every nook and cranny of these unique "labyrinthine" levels to "get to the heart of each touching story."

Will Sonic's creators be able to truly bring this all-new world to life? We're excited to find out! **– DAVID**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER: BALAN COMPANY
RELEASE: TBA 2021 RATING: RP

YS IX: MONSTRUM NOX

Localization? Confirmed. Switch version? Confirmed!

SIX ISSUES LATER, the moment I'd hoped for is here.

Back in our Halloween special NF #42 last year, I penned a short preview of Ys IX: Monstrum Nox – despite the fact that, at that time, it had not yet been confirmed to be getting a Switch version, and it also hadn't even been promised a localization for its original PS4 form either. Even still, I kicked off our coverage of the game here in this English-language Nintendo-focused periodical in confidence that both of those reveals would be forthcoming in the future. And so they have arrived! NF #42 preview, your existence has indeed been retroactively justified.

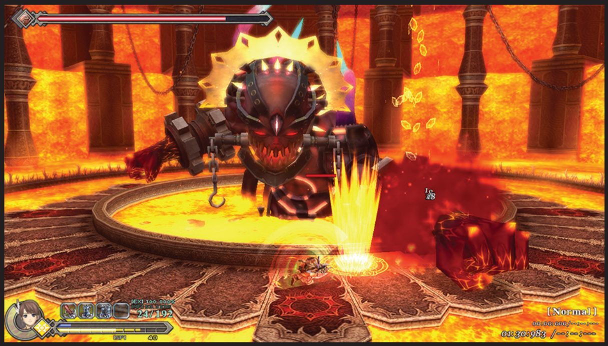
Now, let's dive into our anticipation fully! Ys IX: Monstrum Nox is the 10th game is the long-running Ys series (more on that numerical disconnect in the next preview), and it advances the timeline of hero Adol Christin's exploits further than ever before. That might seem like a detail that's not worth noting, but the previous release in this saga, Ys VIII, actually took place between the events of Ys V and Ys VI. An interquel, if you will. But now the story's moving forward again.

. . . Though Adol would perhaps prefer to travel back in time once more instead! Ys IX's tale sees him locked away in a massive "prison city," searching for a way to escape – when helps arrives in the form of some odd new allies: Monstrums. These renegades each possess wild supernatural abilities, and Adol falls in with their group because he, too, begins to manifest otherworldly powers!

This storyline directly impacts gameplay, as Adol and all five of the Monstrums are fully playable, and their powers all help them to traverse the huge prison in different ways. Adol himself has gained a Spider-Man-esque power to slingshot his body toward distant walls and platforms in an instant.

There's much more to discuss now that Ys IX is totally confirmed, so stay tuned for more coverage in future issues! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA
DEVELOPER: NIHON FALCOM
RELEASE: TBA 2021 RATING: RP



YS ORIGIN

Even more Ys? Why, yes! We'll take it!

YES, IT TURNS out we Nintendo Switch fans have not one, but two new (to us) Ys installments to look forward to. In addition to NIS America's upcoming release of Ys IX in 2021, publisher DotEmu is also porting Ys Origin to our preferred platform soon. (By the end of this year, as of this writing. But no confirmed date yet – and you know how this year has been going.)

Ys Origin is the game that broke the number sequence the series had going for it – as well as the streak of featuring red-haired icon Adol Christin in the hero role each and every time. That's because it's a prequel! And quite a prequel, since its story begins a full 700 years before Adol's journey. Think of it like Ys 0. (Or Ys Zero? What's the Roman numeral for the concept of nothing, anyway?)

It gets even more complicated! Ys Origin originally appeared back in 2006 as a PC game . . . which was only released in Japan. It did get an English localization, but not until May of 2012! Then, in recent years, it's been bouncing around to newer systems: PS4, Vita and Xbox One. The Switch is the last to arrive at the party.

But it's still a party you should consider attending! The Ys series is rich with lore, and Origin is the key to unlocking a full understanding of everything that shaped its world and led up to Adol's first time picking up a sword and running headfirst into a wild animal. It has three different playable characters, one of whom is unlocked only after you've finished the stories of the first two, so you can plan on three full runs in order to see everything there is to see. Gameplay is of an older variety than the newest sequels, but not so old that you'll be flung back to the days of bump combat.

More on this one soon too. Cross your fingers for no delay! **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: DOTEMU
DEVELOPER: NIHON FALCOM
RELEASE: TBA 2020 RATING: T

SHIREN THE WANDERER: THE TOWER OF FORTUNE AND THE DICE OF FATE

Not all those who wander are lost.

THE APPEAL OF the Ys series may have eluded you if you, like me, have primarily been a loyal Nintendo system owner over the years. With games like Ys IX and Ys Origin coming to the Switch soon, it can feel intimidating to play catch-up with what's happened in the series so far and get yourself mentally prepared to dive in.

Well, here's another opportunity to fight through that feeling: Shiren the Wanderer is wandering his way back to Nintendo! I'll do my best to set the stage for this one too.

Two issues ago, I presented my review for Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX. In it, I mentioned that the overall Mystery Dungeon series is connected only loosely, as many of its entries star different heroes and adapt different companies' brands.

Shiren is the exception. This roaming ronin is the closest thing the Mystery Dungeon series has to its own main character — which is even more confusing since this particular sequel in his saga doesn't have the words "Mystery Dungeon" in its name at all. But the gameplay at its core is the same as we saw in Rescue Team DX: You explore randomly generated mazes full of monsters to fight. If you fall in battle, though, the penalties are even more harsh here than in Pokémon's spin on the series: Shiren's level will get knocked all the way back down to 1 and you'll lose all your items. Yowch!

I think I'm up for this challenge. I've had my eye on this game since it first hit the PlayStation Vita back in 2016, and I've been waiting for the Switch port announcement almost as long. I'm ready to dive into its dungeons! I will not be intimidated! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: SPIKE CHUNSOFT
RELEASE: TBA 2020 RATING: E10+

BAKUGAN: CHAMPIONS OF VESTROIA

After a decade of absence, Bakugan is back again!

SHIREN THE WANDERER might be familiar to some of you, since he did get a pair of English-language, Nintendo-system releases in the past: one on the DS, and one on the Wii. But when a series lies dormant for over a decade, I just assume that most of its mindshare disappears. So how about another name you might not have heard from since the Wiii era: Bakugan!

Bakugan is one of the monster-collecting series that sprang into life in the wake of the incredible success of the Pokémon brand, and it managed to carve its own niche primarily through its physical toys, which were unique plastic spheres that popped open to spontaneously transform into monster shapes. It got a handful of video games too, the last of which was Bakugan: Defenders of the Core on DS and Wii, released on October 26, 2010.

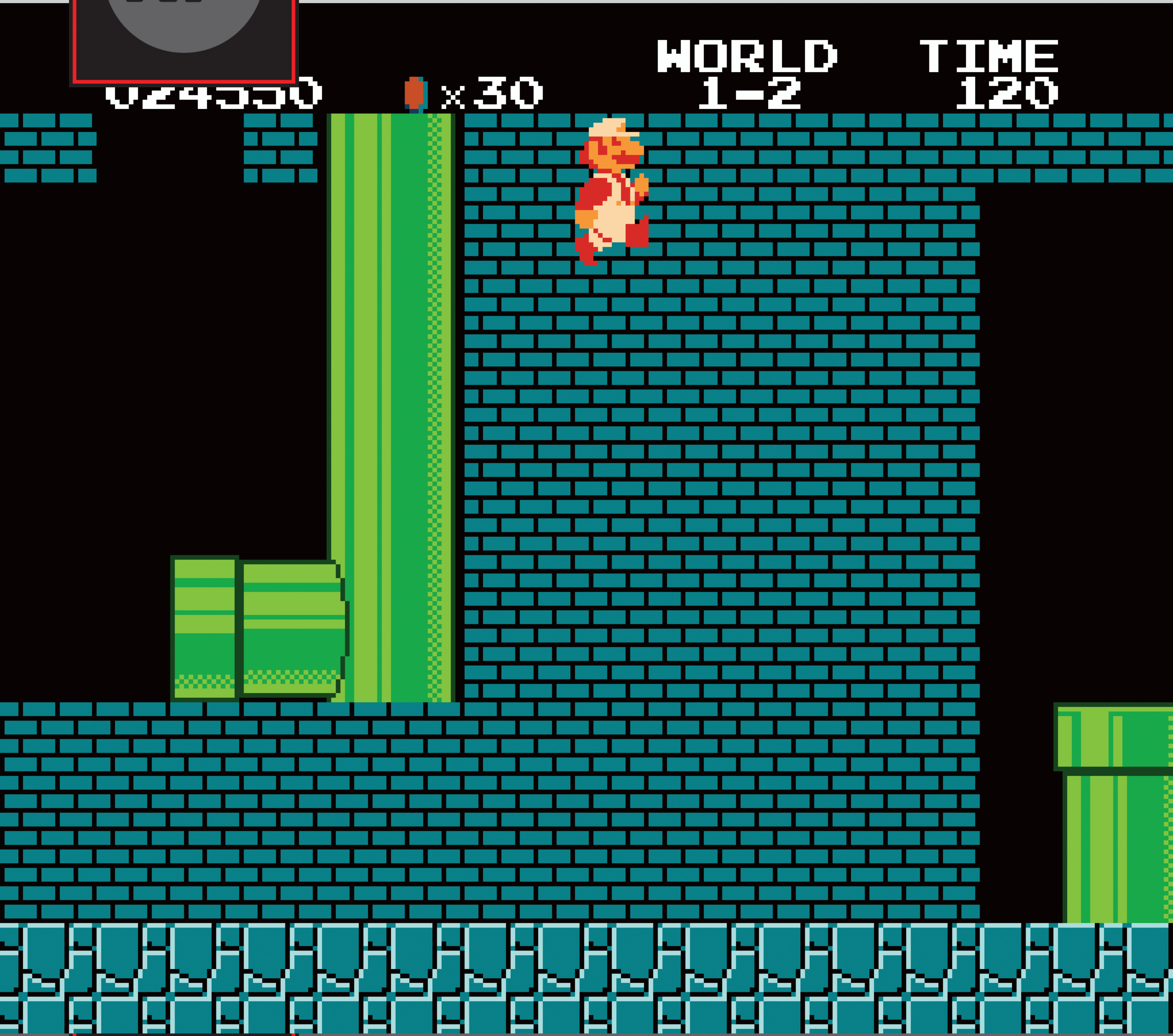
Almost exactly 10 years later, we're finally getting a follow-up! The new Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia is the work of the cartoon-adapting masters at WayForward. Bringing a property like this to life in video game form is their bread and butter, but at the same time they're stretching their wings by presenting a fully 3D adventure! That's stepping out of their 2D comfort zone, and I'm excited to see how it turns out for them.

Nintendo of America has been impressed with their work so far, though, because this game got the honor of being first revealed during an official Nintendo Treehouse broadcast. And I can further confirm that my 6-year-old son sat in rapt attention watching that stream, as he was loving every minute of what he saw.

So Bakugan might have been gone for a while, but it's about to be back in a big way! **— LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS.
DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 3, 2020
RATING: RP

BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING



WALKING THROUGH THE WALL

SUPER MARIO BROS.
NES, 1985

Years before the general public gained access to the Internet and decades prior to whole games being spoiled in their entireties on YouTube on the day of their release (or sometimes even before), there was a marvelous magic in discovering something truly novel and mysterious while playing a new game. In Super Mario Bros., a game filled with invisible blocks and hidden alternate pathways to discover, one secret stood out most of all: walking through the wall at the end of World 1-2! It's the now-legendary trick players pull off in order to access the infamous Minus World and its endless expanse of unconquerable ocean. But try to put yourself in the shoes of those first few who didn't know about it in advance! The ones who jumped *just so* and clipped Mario's body into the bricks for the very first time . . . their minds must have been truly blown! — **LUCAS**

ORIGINAL RELEASE: FAMICOM, SEPTEMBER 13, 1985; NES, OCTOBER 18, 1985 (PRESUMED)
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

PLAYING IT TODAY

Super Mario Bros. is Nintendo's most ported game ever, so sitting down for a quick session these days shouldn't be too much trouble for the majority of the Big N faithful. Its original cartridge release sold so many millions of copies – both by itself and in a pair of multi-game compilation cartridges bundled with NES systems – that to this day used copies can often be purchased for less than a dollar.

Of course, hooking up old NES hardware can be a chore here in 2020. The HDMI-ready, mini-sized NES Classic Edition is better suited for today's TVs, and its lineup of 30 8-bit hits boasts, of course, Super Mario Bros. as its flagship title.

And if you missed out on buying one of those a few years ago due to limited stock? The Nintendo Switch can send you back to '85 as well, since Super Mario Bros. is available for play via the Nintendo Switch Online service (which requires a subscription for long-term access, but offers a free trial of seven days if all you're wanting is a quick shot of Super Mario Bros. nostalgia).

Just beware of the alternate version that's on sale in the Switch eShop! If you type "Super Mario Bros." in the eShop search bar, you'll be directed to a title called Vs. Super Mario Bros., which on the surface seems like the classic we all know and love. Don't be fooled! It's an arcade conversion that ups the difficulty and adds stages that would later be repurposed for The Lost Levels. Consider it "Super Mario Bros. 1.5" – a decent challenge for experienced platforming vets, but a cruel deception for unassuming impulse shoppers! Hold off on it until you've mastered the original.

35 YEARS LATER SUPER MARIO BROS.

A look back at what made Mario's original Super adventure such a masterpiece!

WHERE WOULD OUR beloved hobby be without Super Mario Bros.? Is it even possible to measure the impact this one title has had on the thousands, nay, *millions* of players who owned an NES? Every one has their own story to tell – I'm certainly no exception.

As I've discussed before, my father played in the Japanese professional baseball league during the late '80s. What I've yet to share is that – in addition to his home run record – he was most famous for his thick, luscious mustache. Thus, he was dubbed "Super Mario" by fans.

That's right! I am the *actual* son of Super Mario! So whenever I fire up the latest Mario adventure, a part of my father is there on the screen, stomping Goombas and smashing bricks!

It speaks to the enormous cultural cachet Nintendo's 8-bit opus gained in so short a time span that it was deemed an honor for a foreign-born celebrity to be christened the namesake of Japan's leading digital hero. It's even more impressive how that first trip to the Mushroom Kingdom continues to inspire creatives in all walks of media to this day.

From its characters to iconography to underlying design, Super Mario Bros. is perhaps the most important video game in history. Let's turn the clock back 35 years and explore why that is.

A BROOKLYN PLUMBER IN PRINCESS TOADSTOOL'S COURT

Even though Mario himself was not a global superstar prior to the Japanese debut of Super Mario Bros. in 1985, he could already be considered a video game veteran. He had battled an ape in Donkey Kong, joined forces with his brother Luigi in Mario Bros. and headlined all manner of Game & Watch titles. With a resume that listed gigs such as carpenter, plumber, construction worker, tennis umpire and even soldier, he was Nintendo's go-to guy with enough versatility to take on any task!

All these roles were grounded in realism, presenting Mario as a blue collar champion with whom the average player could find some thread of commonality. Then along came Super Mario Bros., casting our suspenders-clad everyman as the savior of a magical mushroom race. The message was clear: You need not be an all-powerful warrior of legend to save the land from evil. With enough courage and ingenuity, even a plumber could be a hero! As the game's manual emphatically declared, "*You* are Mario! It's up to *you* to save the Mushroom People from the black magic of the Koopa!"

Beyond the door lay a fantastic realm populated by strange denizens that tickled players' imaginations – sinister yet adorable brown mushrooms littered your path, as did winged turtles, carnivorous plants and anthropomorphic bullets the size of Mario's torso. And at the end of your journey, a fortress guarded by the Koopa King, Bowser, who had imprisoned the Mushroom Kingdom's Princess Toadstool. But it wasn't the princess awaiting salvation – rather, one of her Mushroom Retainers who delivered that now-infamous line: "Thank you Mario! But our princess is in another castle!"

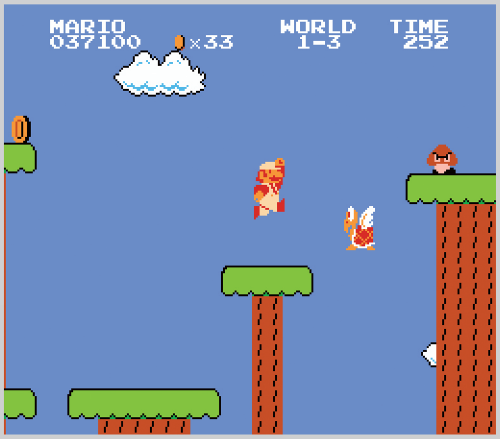
Where was this princess, anyway? What did she look like? Schoolyards ran rampant with stories of kids who claimed to have locked lips with the elusive monarch in a victory make-out session as reward for their efforts! Oh, the tall tales we told for the sake of street cred!

Considering all the sights that seem to have been sourced from various myths and folklore, calling this realm a "wonderland" would be rather apt. Honestly, where else would the idea for Super Mushrooms that made Mario grow have come from if not Alice in Wonderland? Somehow, this union of ideas coalesced into a beautiful hodgepodge every bit as magical and enduring as the most beloved children's fantasy literature.

(Speaking of which, in a 2009 Iwata Asks, Mario designer Shigeru Miyamoto claimed that any supposed link between Super Mushrooms and Lewis Carroll's novel was merely coincidental. Ha! No one buys your revisionism, Miyamoto!)

WELCOME TO WARP ZONE!

When Miyamoto and assistant director Takashi Tezuka were planning Super Mario Bros., they had sincerely set out to make the be-all, end-all Famicom game, meant to bookend the life of Nintendo's first console. That fact is hard to fathom from a Western perspective, until you remember that the Famicom actually launched two years



ahead of the NES, and that the add-on, hardware-enhancing Famicom Disk System peripheral was going to be the company's primary focus going forward. (Things didn't quite pan out the way Nintendo envisioned, did they?)

What this meant was that every piece of technical know-how gleaned from previous Famicom titles would be used to craft a showcase that audiences had never seen, neither at home nor in the arcades. It's crucial to understand that players during that era were conditioned to expect endless score attacks with a narrow catalog of repeated content – run the short gauntlet of levels, loop to the beginning with slightly increased enemy aggression, onward and upward. I wouldn't doubt that there were a handful of players who reached the fortress in World 1-4, thinking they were on the home stretch, only for their jaws to hit the floor when the next leg of the journey began!

Granted, given the technological constraints the development team was bound by, not every single level was a unique creation. There were several repeats – World 5-4 was World 2-4 with more Fire Bars, some of the same coin-filled underground bonus chambers popped up more than once, and the only two underwater levels differed solely in concentration of Bloopers – but with a whopping 32 stages to conquer, who could fault Nintendo for cheating just a touch?

Players were hypnotized, determined to plumb the depths of the Mushroom Kingdom for mysteries untold. The discovery of the first invisible 1-Up Block was a clue that secrets could be hidden in plain sight just about anywhere. Did you make sure to crouch on every pipe? Any one could send you to a shortcut. Did you find the hidden vines that let you climb up into the clouds? Or maybe you heard from a friend that hopping over the top of the screen in the underground would lead to a Warp Zone that let you skip over some levels entirely!

So dense were these whimsical lands that people to this day continue to discover new techniques to demonstrate their mastery over the Koopa army. What lies beyond the flagpole at the end of a stage? It seemed like Mario could leap over the top if he had *juuust* a little extra wiggle room. But that's not possible, right? Well, as John Leguizamo would say in the Super Mario Bros. movie, "Nothing's impossible!"

DO THE MARIO!

Gaming is an interactive medium, with every piece of visual and aural feedback informing the user's next inputs. In its early years, that feedback was spartan, conveying only enough information as was necessary. As technology advanced, graphics improved to the point where you no longer had to imagine what the pixels on the screen were trying to represent. Audio, on the other hand, remained in the background as a "heartbeat," a solely utilitarian element meant to build tension. The concept of an honest-to-goodness video game soundtrack had not been fully realized.

Super Mario Bros. was one of the first titles to run with that ball, and easily the one to elevate game music into the realm of artistry. When composer Koji Kondo, a fresh-faced Osaka University grad who had only recently joined Nintendo, was asked to write the score, he knew he wanted to approach the task differently than his contemporaries. Music had to be woven into the gameplay to make it an integral facet of the experience, and not, as he once described in a 2007 Wired interview, "just sit there and be something that plays while you play the game."

Without looking at the screen, listening to Kondo's compositions painted a picture of the action – the gentle currents of the Underwater theme, the bubbling intensity of the Castle theme, the vast emptiness of the Underground theme. But none held a candle to the masterpiece that was the Ground theme, more informally known as the Super Mario Bros. theme. The sound was poppy and athletic, and always synced perfectly with Mario's pace; short enough to be instantly memorable, yet dynamic enough that it never became stale after repeated listens.

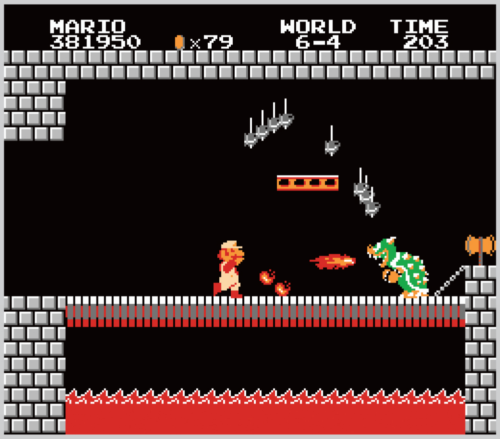
The Mario theme has become shorthand for game music as an institution, breaking the pop culture barrier and becoming ingrained in the minds of the greater populace. Hum a few bars and even non-gamers would instantly recognize that tune! But for those who spent their youth in front of the cathode ray box, it's a song that reminds them of Fire Flowers, a distressed damsel and the joy of play.

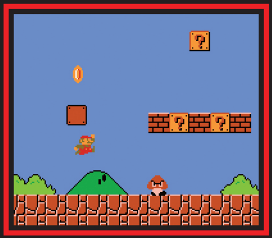
YOUR QUEST IS (NEVER) OVER

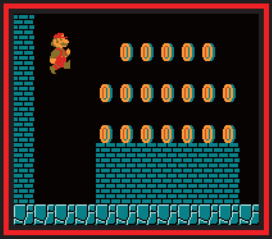
With sales of over 40,000,000 copies on NES alone, Super Mario Bros. was the 8-bit platform's best-selling software by a landslide. Factor in the numerous ports over the decades, and you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who hasn't at least sampled this landmark title at some point.

Of course, what was once considered the cream of the digital crop has lost some of its luster. Later Mario entries as well as platforming torchbearers like Sonic the Hedgehog and Crash Bandicoot have since built upon that foundation. Even modern classics such as Super Meat Boy and Celeste, with their refined controls and strong positive reinforcement loops, could be considered graduates of Mario's school of design. What reason is there to revisit those early Koopa-crushing escapades for any reason other than novelty's sake? Perhaps Super Mario Bros. is best left as a fond memory, to be appreciated for what it accomplished and the legacy it left behind.

Or perhaps . . . perhaps there's still magic in that old cartridge, waiting to inspire a new generation of gamers picking up the controller for the first time. **– TONY**

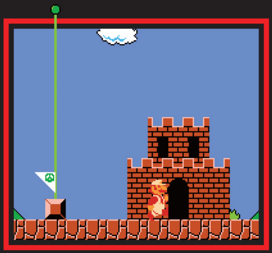






THE WONDER OF WORLD 1-1

While Super Mario Bros. may seem simple by today's standards, it was an avalanche of unfamiliar mechanics once upon a time. Rather than alienate players with dry tutorials, though, designers Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka wanted their lessons to be delivered more organically. Enter World 1-1, the quintessential level design masterclass! Every skill necessary to conquer the game is conveyed in a manner anyone could comprehend. Imagine picking up a controller for the first time and seeing the little mustachioed man on the TV. You think, "Hmm . . . these arrows on the pad must move him around. But what's this brown mushroom creature? Ack! It touched me and sent me back to the beginning! How do I avoid it? Maybe one of these other buttons . . . yes! I can jump! I'll just hop over and . . . oops! I landed on it and it . . . got squished? Interesting! Those flashing question marks seem suspicious. What if I hit them from below? Oh no! Another shroom! Better stomp this fella and . . . did I just get bigger?" At some point between the discovery of your first Warp Pipe and the surge of adrenaline from your first Super Star, this breezy obstacle course becomes something greater – a comforting oasis you'll happily revisit time and time again!



LEFT IN THE PAST
HOTEL MARIO

The long-lost Super Mario spin-off that we'll never see again.

NINTENDO'S HISTORY WITH the CD-i is a strange one. It's a tale of CD-ROM add-ons, PlayStations, betrayal . . . and a rare window of opportunity for electronics manufacturer Philips to create a handful of video games featuring Nintendo's mascots. The most famous of these are three Zelda games often referred to as the Unholy Triforce. They have a pretty unsavory reputation, and deservedly so – they're undeniably awful games with hilariously terrible voice acting and animated cutscenes.

Hotel Mario often gets lumped in with them by association – being the only other game actually released on the system with Nintendo characters in it – but unlike Zelda's trilogy of terribleness, Hotel Mario isn't actually all that bad. No, it's not some sort of overlooked lost classic, but it's not the abomination it's been made out to be either. Hotel Mario sits squarely in the realm of mediocrity, with its bizarre personality and Mario branding providing the only reasons it hasn't been completely forgotten.

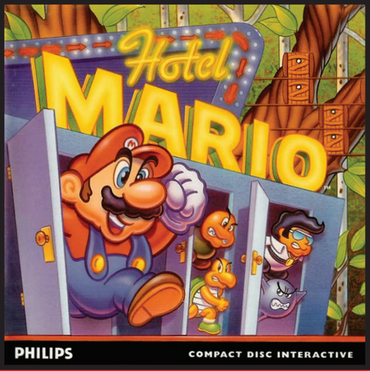
As you can guess by the title, this isn't a traditional Mario platformer. Sure, there's Goomba-stomping galore, but its gameplay bears much more of a surprising resemblance to one of Mario's earliest NES spin-offs, Wrecking Crew. In Hotel Mario, each stage presents you with a series of hallways, doors and elevators. Your objective is to close all of the doors in the stage, similar to how you have to break down all the walls in Wrecking Crew. However, it's not quite as simple as just walking up to said doors and closing them one by one. Enemies walking around the stages can reopen any doors they pass, and Mario's jumping ability is severely limited, similar to what he's capable of in the original Donkey Kong. This means you have to plan your moves in advance based on where enemies will be at certain times, and use the many elevators placed throughout each stage to get from floor to floor.

Once all the doors are closed, you move on to the next level, and you repeat this until the end of the game. There are boss encounters involving the Koopalings and eventually Bowser himself, but no matter what you're faced with, it always ultimately comes down to closing all the doors. Once you do that, all surviving enemies are immediately defeated and Mario does a funny dance before inexplicably spinning around and floating into the sky.

Anyway, while the game itself is OK, its unique sense of style is what makes it truly memorable. The gameplay doesn't look too terribly far removed from something you'd find on the SNES, albeit considerably more generic. The cutscenes, though, look like a low-quality imitation of The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!, with the Bros. exhibiting more "realistic" proportions. Both Mario and Luigi are voiced by Marc Graue, who has also done voice work in the Ratchet & Clank, Warcraft and Grand Theft Auto series. Unlike the cheerful tones of Charles Martinet's version of the character, Graue played Mario closer to how Captain Lou did on the Super Show – as a plumber from Brooklyn with a love for pasta and Italian stereotypes.

Hotel Mario may not live up to the franchise's legacy, but it's hardly the dumpster fire its Zelda-branded cousins are. There's some fun to be had with the pseudo-puzzle elements in play, like hiding in doorways so enemies can't hit you, or coming up with a carefully timed plan to safely get from floor to floor. It's even got a handful of genuinely chuckle-worthy gags, like "Larry's Cave Hotel: This Mine is Mine" and the nonsensical "All toasters toast toast" bit where Mario is seen holding a loaf of "Bowser's Sourpuss Bread." It's not high art, but it could have been a whole lot worse.

So the next time you find yourself in the unlikely scenario of being face to face with a Philips CD-i, give Hotel Mario a spin. If nothing else, it's a fascinating little piece of Mario's history. **— KRIS**



ORIGINAL RELEASE: PHILIPS CD-i, APRIL 5, 1994
PUBLISHER: ROYAL PHILIPS ELECTRONICS
DEVELOPER: FANTASY FACTORY

PLAYING IT TODAY

Unsurprisingly, Hotel Mario has never been re-released in any form. That means the only legitimate way to play it today is on original hardware, which isn't easy or cheap. You'll have to track down a functional CD-i, an accompanying controller with a proper D-Pad (since playing with any of the CD-i's pack-in remotes is an exercise in frustration), some way to connect it all to your TV if you don't have an old CRT laying around, and the game itself – which can run over $50 for just the disc. This is one hard hotel to check into!

AN INFAMOUS INTRO

In recent years, you may have stumbled across a bit of Hotel Mario without realizing it – its intro scene featuring Mario and Luigi setting up the game's story (and breaking the fourth wall to ask for help from you, the player) has been mined for meme material mercilessly. Venture down the rabbit hole by searching YouTube for "Hotel Mario memes" if you dare, but don't miss the praiseworthy culmination of the trend: "The Hotel Mario Reanimated Collab" that saw over 80 different animators remake multiple scenes from the game. It's got over 1,300,000 views!

ORIGINAL RELEASE: SUPER FAMICOM, AUGUST 27, 1993
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: GAME FREAK

PLAYING IT TODAY

Sadly, the only release of this game that exists is on the Japanese Super Famicom. Fortunately, while it may be Lost, it isn't really Untranslated – the whole game is in English, meaning it might be worth tracking down an imported copy!

ACTRAISER 2 ENIX

Recently your Pak Pro hit the road to visit Enix and got a first-hand look at ActRaiser 2 in development for the Super NES. The sequel to the 1991 hit shares the phenomenal sound and graphics, but it doesn't have the simulation aspect that was central to the original. As any ActRaiser veteran can tell you, the action was fast, furious and varied. In the 12 megabit ActRaiser 2, due for release this November, expect even more variety and more challenge—seven stages and 60 levels! Your warrior hero has wings this time, which adds a new dimension to your fighting. Level selection also stems from the original game. You fly above the world in a sort of temple flying saucer until you spot a town, cave or castle below, then you drop to earth and launch into action. During the fight, you'll be able to use limited magical attacks in addition to your sword.

INSPECTOR GADGET HUDSON SOFT

Inspector Gadget may bumble and fumble, but he always brings in his man. When Hudson Soft brings the DIC comic cartoon detective to the Super NES this fall, that success rate will be up to you. The Inspector must pursue Dr. Claw through seven levels around the world to save his niece, Penny. Levels include a haunted castle, the Pyramids, the Jungle and the City. Gadget has a dozen robotic add-on gadgets he can use during his investigations, from extendable limbs to a remarkable pop up hat that can contain all sorts of special tools. Your Pak Police felt the game did justice to the slapstick feel of the television show. For instance, if the Inspector takes a hit, he loses his overcoat and must continue on in his boxer shorts. Even better, the game was challenging and filled with surprises including hidden areas and lots of Power-Ups.

MARIO & WARIO NINTENDO

Mario & Wario from Nintendo is a Super NES action strategy game that has its roots in Lemmings. The idea is that Mario must wear buckets and other makeshift helmets to protect himself from Wario, who buzzes and bombards the plumber. The problem is that Mario can't see where he's going. In this game, you play the part of Wanda, the flying sprite who steers Mario and creates blocks to allow him through the obstacle-ridden stages.

110 NINTENDO POWER

LOST AT THE LAST MINUTE

It's anyone's guess why Mario & Wario never left Japan – especially as Nintendo seemed quite intent on releasing it all over the world. Nintendo Power previewed it in the September 1993 edition of Pak Watch, with a "Fall '93" release slated. They even went so far as to feature the game in a cross promotion with Kellogg's, complete with a box mock-up featuring new art. We weren't alone: Publications from Canada to the UK to Brazil also anticipated 1993 releases. The plan just kicked the bucket, for some reason!

LOST IN UNTRANSLATION MARIO & WARIO

It's-a rarity: a Mario game that missed America!

AFTER SONIC & KNUCKLES, but before Mega Man & Bass, there was Mario & Wario. Each of these titles carry with them some level of renown, each for various reasons.

In Sonic & Knuckles, players got to take control of each eponymous character in what would come to be known as one half of one of the greatest Sonic games of all time, thanks to its revolutionary Lock-On Technology. Mega Man & Bass would be more commonly known by its Japanese name of Rockman & Forte, as it would be years before it received a Western release – albeit only on Game Boy Advance – and was the first non-arcade release in the core original Mega Man series to allow players to play as someone else, in addition to the Blue Bomber himself.

As for Mario & Wario? Perhaps its greatest claim to fame is being the Mario game we almost got, but never did.

Going by the other two titles, you might think that this is another Mario platformer, one where you get your choice of which capped crusader you'll use to conquer around eight or so worlds and fight the villain at the end, all while exploiting the chosen one's unique abilities and skill sets. You *might* think that, but then, you would be mistaken.

Unlike those other similarly titled games, Mario & Wario isn't a mainline game, or even a platforming side story. In fact, it's barely a platformer at all, and you don't even use a regular controller – rather, your input device is the Super NES Mouse.

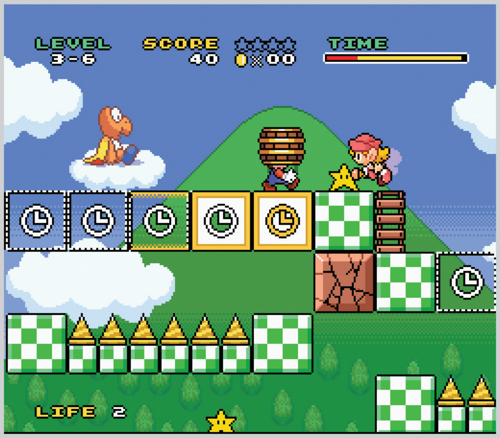
Mario & Wario was designed by one Satoshi Tajiri at Game Freak. You might have heard of them – they made this thing called "Pokémon," but I'm not sure whether or not it ever caught on. (That said, Pokémon would reference this game in its first generation releases.) Tajiri had originally planned for this game to involve launching nets with the Super Scope. However, development difficulties led to them opting for the SNES Mouse instead, and it even came with the device in Japan.

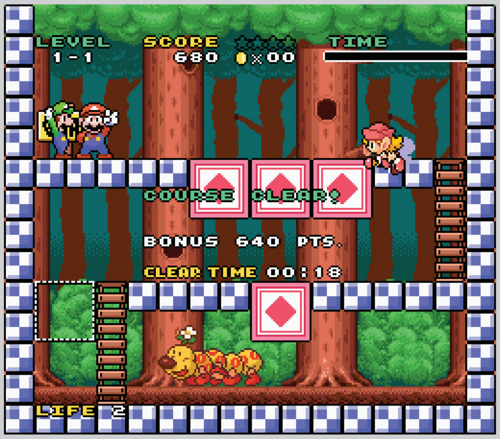
Another difference from the other "&" games of the time is that you don't even get to play as Mario *or* Wario. Rather, players take control of a fish – er, fairy called Wanda, who moves around the full expanse of the screen, making sure things are safe for not only Mario, but Yoshi and Princess Peach as well.

You see, the reason they need the help is because Wario decided to take up a new hobby: using his personal plane, the Bulldog, to drop objects on people's heads that they can't get off, leaving them visually impaired. So Mario, Yoshi or Peach (your choice, with each moving at a different speed) are left to walk along blindly, and it's up to Wanda (and you) to see to it that they reach the end of the stage successfully, where Luigi can safely remove the bucket, barrel or whatever else Wario has used to cover your character's cranium. Rinse and repeat (with occasional Wario-whacking minigames along the way) until you're finally able to give Wario his comeuppance.

While not a traditional Mario game by any stretch of the imagination, Mario & Wario still carries with it a lot of the charm fans have come to expect from products carrying the big red "M." The levels are bright and colorful, the music is whimsical and the characters' pixel art has a cartoon charm that might even outdo the one traditional Mario platformer that did come to the Super NES, Super Mario World.

Unfortunately, despite the Nintendo DS, 3DS and Wii U all seeming like perfect places for touchscreen ports of the game, Nintendo has never re-released this ampersand altercation. Not even in Japan, for those few fans who actually had the option to own the original version! **– DAVID**





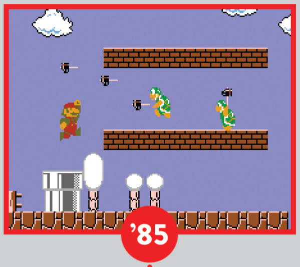
CHARACTER PROFILE
THE HAMMER BROTHERS

This year might mark the 35th birthday of the original Super Mario Bros., but that means it's also time to celebrate the same milestone for another pair of brothers! Let's take a look back at the career of the Turtle Tribe's terrifying, tool-tossing twin terrapins! (Yes, there are two of them. At least, that was the case back in '85.)

FIRST APPEARANCE
SUPER MARIO BROS. (1985)

CAREER HIGHS

The Hammer Brothers burst onto the scene in the very first Super Mario quest, attacking as a team of two!



Some games paid homage to their origins as a pair, though!

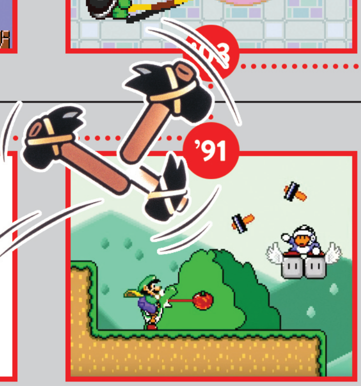
A great honor: helping to launch the concept of Assist Trophies in Super Smash Bros. Brawl!

The Hammer Brothers have been a part of the Super Mario story since the very beginning, and they've become truly iconic recurring enemies with dozens of appearances in all kinds of roles since then.

The plurality of them being two brothers has mostly been lost along the way, but there's always hope for the future! Maybe Mario and Luigi could capture two in Odyssey 2?

CAREER LOWS

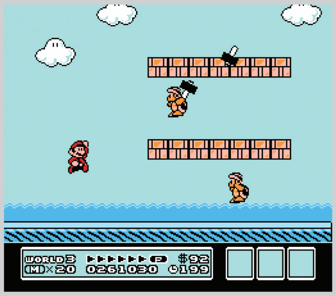
Mario stole their gimmick (and their clothes!) and started hurling hammers of his own . . .



. . . and their time as a twosome was short-lived, as they quickly began being used as solo foes instead.

A great disgrace: being forced to chuck helpful coins to Mario and Luigi in New Super Mario Bros. 2.

HIGHLIGHTS



SUPER MARIO BROS. 3
NES, 1990

Their second major appearance was their biggest in the early years, as several other varieties of their species were introduced, and they also became iconic "wandering" foes on the overworld maps!

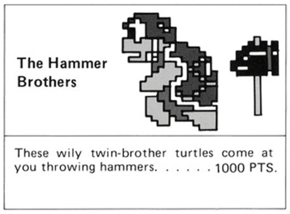
SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
SWITCH, 2017

Super Mario Bros. 3 let Mario and Luigi cosplay as Hammer Brothers, true, but Super Mario Odyssey took the idea of stealing their identity one step further by allowing Mario to literally leap into their bodies! They also added a new "weapon" to their arsenal: flying frying pans of pain!

MARIO KART TOUR
MOBILE, 2019 (ADDED AS PLAYABLE IN 2020)

Though they're locked down by the Gacha system, credit where credit's due: Decades' worth of traditional Mario Kart series sequels all missed their chance to put the Hammer Brothers in the driver's seat, but the mobile Mario Kart Tour is the game that's finally given them the green flag.

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

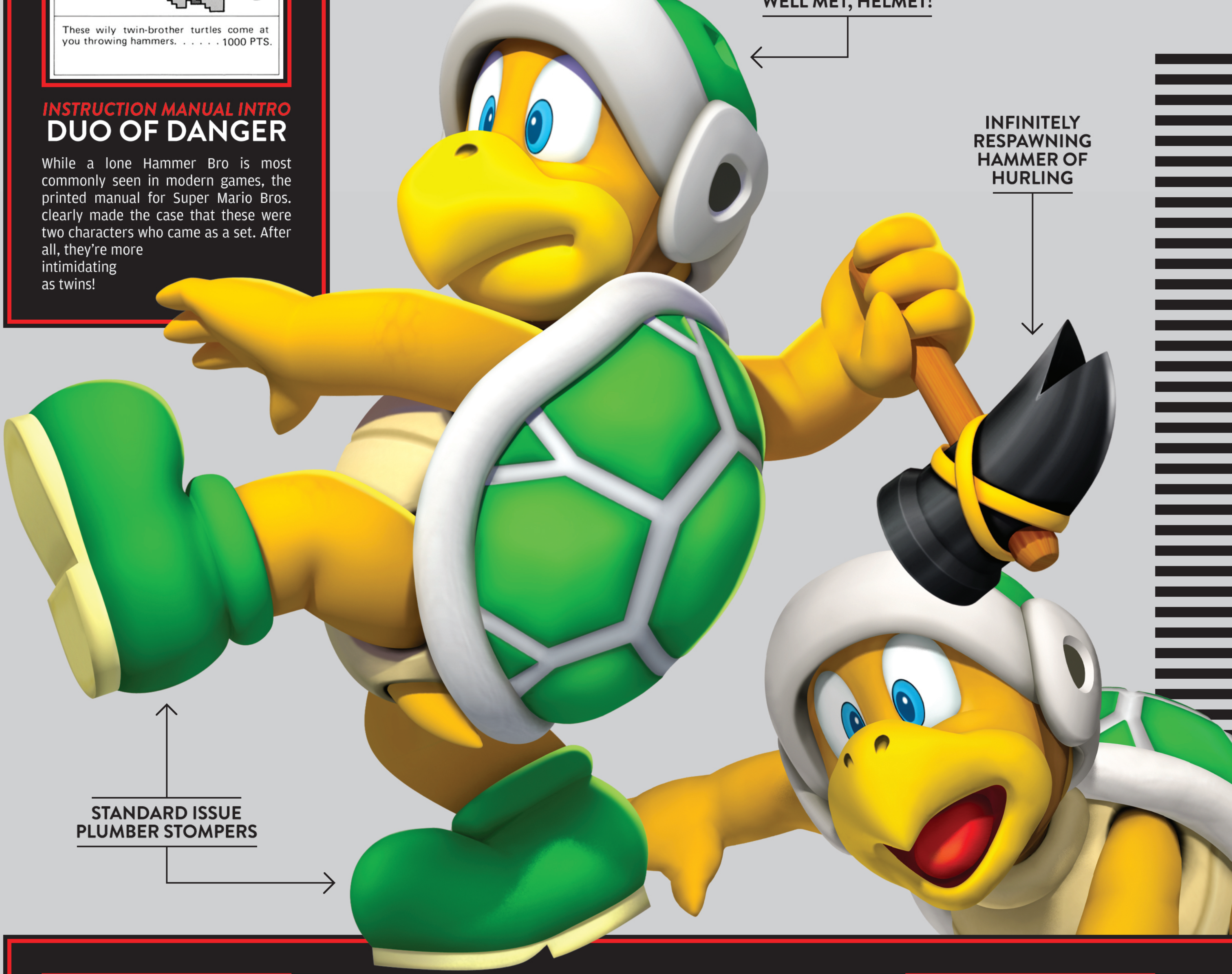

The Hammer Brothers

These wily twin-brother turtles come at you throwing hammers. . . . . . 1000 PTS.

INSTRUCTION MANUAL INTRO

DUO OF DANGER

While a lone Hammer Bro is most commonly seen in modern games, the printed manual for Super Mario Bros. clearly made the case that these were two characters who came as a set. After all, they're more intimidating as twins!



BROTHERS FROM OTHER MOTHERS?

A VAST VARIETY OF VARIANTS

Hammers have remained these turtle bros' weapon of choice for 35 years now . . . but they've also expanded their family to encompass other brothers with a wide array of alternative armaments! Responding to Mario's theft of the Hammer Bros. Suit in Super Mario Bros. 3, some Bros turned the tables right back by stealing his signature fireballs! Others swapped out their one-toss tools for boomerangs that would come back to them, while still others put on some extra weight. (Enough to shake the Earth!) Freezing the plumber in his tracks with magical ice, halting his momentum with the strength of sumo wrestling, even trying to give him origami paper cuts? By now, it's clear anything goes!

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

SEPTEMBER 1995 MARKED the peak of the Rare/Nintendo partnership, as NP #76 featured both the SNES version of Killer Instinct and Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest adorning its cover. Also inside were the Super NES versions of DOOM, Syndicate, The Mask and Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story, as well as Castlevania: Dracula X, which split poster duties with the upcoming Batman Forever.

For Portable Power Players, Virtual Boy had the Star Fox-esque Red Alarm and T&E Soft's Golf, while Galaxian and Galaga came to the Super Game Boy. The results of the Game Boy: Play It Loud Series ad contest were announced, with several entries featured across two pages, and a special interview featured Nintendo of America's "Men of Power," NOA President Minoru Arakawa and Chairman Howard Lincoln.

Speaking of the Virtual Boy (enjoy it while it lasts), this month's Player's Poll winners would receive a trip out to Nintendo headquarters to pick up their very own, along with a selection of games and the chance to playtest upcoming releases. For fans of epic games, Epic Center brought news, more Chrono Trigger, Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV: Wall of Fire and some Ogre Battle strategies.

The Super NES Power Charts were topped by Donkey Kong Country, with Killer Instinct closing in at third and The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening ruling the Game Boy. K.I. also bested Super Street Fighter II and Mortal Kombat II in the Top 10 Fighting Games, and its ill-fated Ultra 64 counterpart joined the console itself atop the Most Wanted list. The Hall of Fame saw three arcade inductees in Donkey Kong, Pac-Man and Space Invaders: The Arcade Game.

Pak Watch highlights included NHL '96, The Lost Vikings 2, Defender/Joust, Tecmo Super Bowl 3: Final Edition, Demolition Man and, for Virtual Boy, Virtual League Baseball. Closing things out was an ad inviting Power Players to come to Blockbuster Video to try out the Virtual Boy and enter a "3-D" sweepstakes with NBC.

October 1995 marked the 10th anniversary of Super Mario Bros., and to celebrate the occasion, Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island was featured on the cover of NP #77, which also included an exclusive preview of Super Mario RPG. Joining Mario inside were Batman Forever, Primal Rage, Aaahh!!! Real Monsters and Mega Man 7, sharing poster space with Waterworld for Virtual Boy. Epic Center covered Sid Meier's Civilization, previewed Secret of Evermore and offered strats for Chrono Trigger. Exclusive Virtual Boy previews looked at Vertical Force and Panic Bomber (featuring Bomberman), while the Game Boy got Aladdin and its own entire Sports Scene with NBA Jam Tournament Edition, PGA Tour Invitational, Madden Blitz '96, NHL Hockey and Foreman for Real.

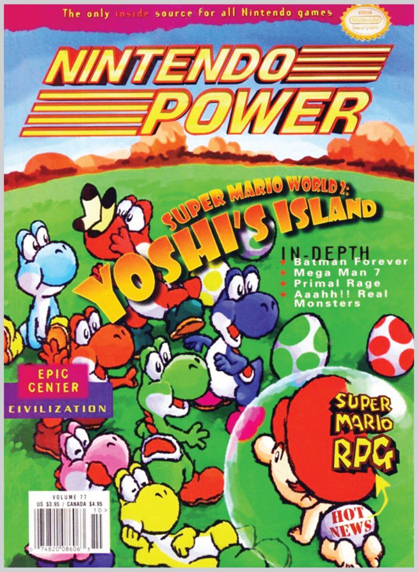
This issue also held one of the most ill-fated Player's Poll contests in the magazine's history, with the winner getting to go to the set of The Mask II and play the part of an extra. (The problem, of course, would wind up being that this version of the movie was never made.)

Killer Instinct Ultra Combo'd its way past DKC to the top of the SNES Power Chart, with Donkey Kong Land taking Game Boy's #1 spot. K.I. also bested MK3 and Fatal Fury Special for the Top 10 Arcade Games, and in anticipation of Yoshi's Island, Super Mario Bros., Super Mario Land and Super Mario World were all added to the Hall of Fame.

Closing things out, Pak Watch was headlined by Mortal Kombat 3, and also Jack Bros. – the first Shin Megami Tensei game to come West! **– DAVID**

ISSUE #76: SEPTEMBER 1995

ISSUE #77: OCTOBER 1995



SUPER MARIO WORLD 2 YOSHI'S ISLAND

TEN YEARS AGO AN UNKNOWN PLUMBER STARTED HIS CAREER IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK. NOW PREPARE FOR WORLDWIDE SEISMIC REPERCUSSIONS AS THE LONG AWAITED SEQUEL TO SUPER MARIO WORLD ARRIVES IN STORES. DISCOVER MARIO'S LATEST ADVENTURE... ON YOSHI'S ISLAND!

BABY MARIO DROPS IN! YOSHI'S ISLAND

Long ago, high above Yoshi's Island, a stork ran into trouble on his way to the Mushroom Kingdom. It seemed that the evil magikoopa Kamek, divined that the two bundles carried by this particular stork contained misfortune for future King Bowser. Taking matters into his own hands, Kamek rammed the bird and snatched the bundles. Kamek didn't notice right away, that when one child had slipped off his broomstick and tumbled to the island below. Now it's up to the Yoshies to reunite the twins and return them to their parents.

After four years of development, Yoshi's Island, the sequel to Super Mario World, is finally here. Outstanding and unique graphics, smooth play control and a wide variety of levels and enemies make this battery-backed game worth every minute of the wait. Game graphics are unique in texture and design—high octane eye candy for the most jaded video game enthusiasts. Yoshi's Island employs the Super FX2 chip, but don't expect the polygon structures typical of other FX games like Star Fox and Stunt Race FX—in this game the chip's polygon effects are subtle and deeply imbedded within the program. Various enemies change shape and size via morphmation, a special programming technique available only through the Super FX2 chip. And it's not just a visual treat—Yoshi's Island possesses qualities of universal appeal to all players. Relatively easy early stages allow beginners to progress through the game, while special levels devour video game veterans.

With over 60 levels and 130 different types of enemies, Yoshi's Island is packed with variety and challenge. If you played the original Super Mario World, you remember going for a perfect score by finding all of the exits in every level of the game. When you insert the sequel, you'd better make sure you have lots of extra time—if you want to see everything in Yoshi's Island, you need to

SPECIAL LEVELS

collect all of the special items in every level of the game. Special items consist of stars, red coins and flowers, and when you complete a level, a chalkboard tallies your finds. You can check out your results on the Level Selection screen or scroll back to previous areas to try for higher scores. Collect all of the items in every level of a world and the game grants access to an even tougher special level.

BONUS STAGES

Looking for trouble? If you nail a perfect score in every level, a special stage and bonus challenge game appear. The special stages are designed to blow away the most advanced game players.

64 STAGES OF TODDLER TROUBLE

Yoshi's Island is packed with over sixty levels, including sixteen special stages. Players need to collect all of the items and obtain a perfect score in each level of a world to access the special stages.

GO FOR 100% !

If you want to finish all of Yoshi's Island, you must collect EVERYTHING. Gather all the flowers, coins and stars in each level and don't let go of Baby Mario!

BONUS CHALLENGE

At the end of each level is a roulette ring of flowers to jump through, just like the goal posts in Super Mario World. If you time your jump well, you can win extra prizes in the Bonus Challenge game.

NO MORE TEARS FORMULA

There are two ways to end a level: find and jump through the goal ring or lose Baby Mario to Kamek's wandering hordes of henchmen. Keep Mario in Yoshi's's saddle and you won't hear any infant complaints.

Green Yoshi executed it to the goal ring and the baby handoff! If the ring cursor lands on a flower, you can play a Bonus Challenge game.

If Yoshi can't recover Mario before time expires, the infant will be snatched by Kamek's minions. Don't give up! Think of Luigi, Princess and Toad!

10 NINTENDO POWER

VOLUME 77 11

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH
February 24, 1987, in Brooklyn, New York

FAVORITE FOOD
Candy

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS
Turned down a TV show role upon being hired at WayForward. Still maintains an active SAG-AFTRA membership "in case this game-making thing doesn't work out."

CURRENT POSITION IN THE INDUSTRY
Designer/Director at WayForward

BEST KNOWN FOR
Games in the Shantae series, Mighty Switch Force! series, Cat Girl Without Salad: Amuse-Bouche, Vitamin Connection, Adventure Time: Hey Ice King, Why'd You Steal Our Garbage?!!

JAMES MONTAGNA

From exploring the Land of Ooo to navigating the intestines of a dog, he'll always show you the way forward!

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

NF: How did you get started in game design?

JAMES: It's the only thing I've ever known! My preschool had an NES with Super Mario Bros. and I was never more enraptured by anything in all four years of my life. I had to have it for myself, and my parents thankfully obliged. As they tell the story, shortly after playing, I scurried to my crayon box to start drawing how *my* game was going to look. A few years later, my family purchased our first home computer – a top-of-the-line Macintosh – which was a huge upgrade from crayons. I started building actual playable games by teaching myself and tinkering for hours on end. Anyhow, I never stopped designing and ended up with dozens of these very experimental game creations to my name before I was even out of high school. As a matter of fact, I recently found a stack of old Zip disks with several creations from my childhood, and . . . a few of those games got really abstract and bizarre. Someday, perhaps I'll stream a playthrough of a few.

As for designing professionally, my college planned a tour of WayForward since it was the local game development studio. When the tour concluded, I took the opportunity to show the company president, Voldi Way, some of the games I'd made. At that moment, a suggestion from my professor to consider me for an internship resulted in a job that I've held ever since. I'll be forever thankful that Voldi gave me a chance back then.

You've worked on everything from huge properties like SpongeBob SquarePants to more obscure IPs like Wonder Momo. How have you managed to stay original while still meeting the expectations that come from working on a beloved brand?

So, alongside contributing to original WayForward titles like Mighty Switch Force! and the Shantae series, I've had the honor of working with a variety of licenses. And while the sources of these properties span the worlds of movies, TV shows and even other gaming brands, no matter what the property is or where it's from, we've got to respect the source material. We typically become obsessively invested in whatever it is we're working on, and reach the status of mega fans ourselves. I feel that perspective helps us know what the "guidelines" of the brand are, and how far we can push things while still being true to the expectations that come with being a game set in an established universe.

I might also add that the constraint of having an existing concept to work from provides a certain ease in thinking creatively, because it grounds us with a strong starting point and allows us to come up with clever ideas that will fit around it. Making something entirely original like Vitamin Connection is actually a lot more challenging in certain ways, because there is no existing reference. I have to come up with an answer to every question – what's the story from all perspectives? Where does every level take place? How would each character react to situations based on their personality? Being the creator means you're responsible for establishing the world down to the last detail.

One of your most popular games is Adventure Time: Hey Ice King! Why'd You Steal Our Garbage?!!, the very first game based on the beloved TV series. Do you have any stories about working with Adventure Time creator Pen Ward, or any other big-name creators?

It's true, a lot of folks bring up that specific Adventure Time game to this day! It makes me happy to have provided a memorable experience that left an impact on so many players. I believe the real magic of that game came from how hands-on Pen was willing to be in development. He would visit WayForward to hang out sometimes, and we'd set him up with a desk to work at. We'd then get an email full of concepts he doodled, to the team's delight. At the time, we were occasionally text messaging each other and essentially riffing on ideas for the game. Working on the script was fun because it was just a spreadsheet between the two of us, volleying back and forth with increasingly stupid character dialogue to include, and I ended up laughing to tears. I still remember very late one night, Pen sent an email with the subject line "brilliant idea" and asked me if we could have any characters that run out of stuff to say just yell "AHHH!!!" instead – but I guess we weren't able to get that one in.

I know you used to make plenty of games on your own just for fun. Do you still work on these kinds of side projects from time to time, or do your WayForward titles absorb the bulk of your creative energy these days?

Yes . . . to both! Outside of my main WayForward work, I do still create personal side project games. Usually on the weekends or with any other time I can spare. It's an outlet where I can flex my offbeat creative energy without having to think too much about how the eccentric aspects will be received. But professional work will always be top priority, and for the first time in my career I've recently been solely focused on WayForward stuff.

I actually haven't told anyone this yet, but where I left off, I was looking to follow up the Nintendo 3DS eShop release, Dodge Club Pocket, by bringing my experimental Dodge Club series to Nintendo Switch. So when I can get back to it, expect that to be what I'll explore next! Along with any one of the other dozen bonkers ideas I've got on the backburner. Some days, it feels like there's a high inspiration wave, and the creative faucet won't stop flowing in my head. When this happens, the best thing you can do is start prototyping it on the spot, or take extensive notes to catch the details you can, and circle back to them when they can be realized.

The Super Mario series turns 35 this year, and you and your studio-mates at WayForward are by far some of the biggest Mario fans I've ever met. As someone who's spent years studying these games, what do you think it is about them that's allowed them to endure for so long?

Super Mario is what got so many of us into video games in the first place, and for me personally, it represents a lifelong obsession. As far as the reason the games hold up so well, it isn't any one factor, but many together. The characters, audio, gameplay feel . . . what it really comes down to is a testament to the world-class game designers behind it all. It's easy to lose sight of this if you think of Super Mario games as, like, a standard, or "default" gaming option, but the truth is that they have consistently been leaders of innovation. And as a result, other games stand on the shoulders of conventions that have roots with Super Mario, whether they realize it or not.

For example, I like to think of jumping in the original Super Mario Bros. on NES. Up until that point, many games had a canned jump sequence. That is, you would commit to a direction, press the button, and the jump would occur without any way to manipulate the game until you landed. Super Mario Bros. instead gave the player an incredible amount of control. You can pull back mid-air, change direction, or even get a running jump for extra distance. Holding down the jump button makes you go higher, while just barely tapping it does a tiny hop. This nuance is just a microcosm of the greater attention to detail put into every aspect of these games, and why we're still playing them 35 years later . . . and will enjoy them for many more years to come!

You're also one of the biggest Satoru Iwata fans I've ever met. In fact, when I first saw Vitamin Connection, one of your most recent games, my first thought was "James finally got to make his Adventures of Lolo!". *(Note to readers: Both Vitamin Connection and the Lolo series star a pair of blue and pink protagonists solving environment-based puzzles.)* What kind of creative risks went into creating the game, and how do you feel they were received in the end?

From the games he touched to the words of wisdom he imparted upon us, I look at the life and legacy of Satoru Iwata as a wellspring of inspiration. Before he was Nintendo's president, he was hands-on with the development of so many titles, and those happen to be the games I was most fond of growing up. As you've mentioned, one such title is Adventures of Lolo. To be honest, the resemblance of that game's protagonists to Vitamin Connection heroes Vita-Boy and Mina-Girl wasn't a conscious decision, but rather an incidental one. The games I've loved throughout my life are so deeply ingrained in my own DNA at this point, it stands to reason there will be bits of influence here and there.

As far as creative risks, I think any time you present something unfamiliar to players, that risk is there. Vitamin Connection is a game emphasizing the cooperation between two players, each with a unique role. In fact, even the way you hold the controller compared to one another is unique, as the first player holds the Joy-Con vertically, and the second horizontally. In asking players to adapt to a highly unorthodox control scheme, we knew there was some chance it could be tough to grasp. But it's very important to challenge conventions, too, when breaking new ground. I feel relieved that the accolades have been incredibly positive, though we're still getting the word out about the game right now. I hope players everywhere will give Vitamin Connection a chance!

We were lucky enough to play a small part in the rollout of Vitamin Connection, since Limited Run Games provided an exclusive trading card

featuring Vita-Boy and Mina-Girl for us to distribute to our readers a few issues ago. But that's just scratching the surface of the unique circumstances that brought the game into the world! Can you talk about how the physical publishing agreement with Limited Run came about?
Limited Run Games has been an awesome partner for a while now, having helped us to release previous entries in the Shantae series in physical format for the first time. When we showed them the initial prototype of Vitamin Connection, it was a crude setup over a video call in which we aimed a webcam at a TV, and I demonstrated the game playing as both players by myself since we didn't have single-player functionality yet. I remember thinking it was not the ideal way to pitch the concept, and I convinced myself I blew it. But Limited Run Games immediately understood the spirit behind it and was on board with working together without any question or hesitation. Eventually, they even offered a Collector's Edition box set for the game. As the physical copies will be making their way to their respective homes soon, I have to say the amount of care and meticulous effort Limited Run Games has put into getting every element just right for the release of Vitamin Connection has resulted in something really special.

The WayForward/Limited Run partnership seems to be ramping up even more, as the recent LRG3 video event revealed several classic WayForward games are being brought back to life in physical form – including actual new Game Boy Color cartridges of the original Shantae game! And this is all coming during WayForward's 30th anniversary celebration here in 2020. What's it like to be reaching back decades into the past to bring games forward into the modern era? Are there any vintage titles you'd like to see revived that might not happen due to licensing? (I know a lot of WayForward's back catalog is connected to cartoon properties, like Adventure Time, that WayForward doesn't own.)
WayForward is really enthusiastic about the chance to collaborate further with Limited Run Games! A lot of players express interest in playing older WayForward titles like Xtreme Sports and the first Shantae game, but obtaining the original cartridges can be prohibitive. I can't think of any better way to celebrate WayForward's 30th anniversary than giving players a chance to look back on our history and enjoy these games once again. It's especially exciting to know that the entire Shantae series will soon be playable on one console, so I'm personally looking forward to lining them all up on my Switch HOME Menu!

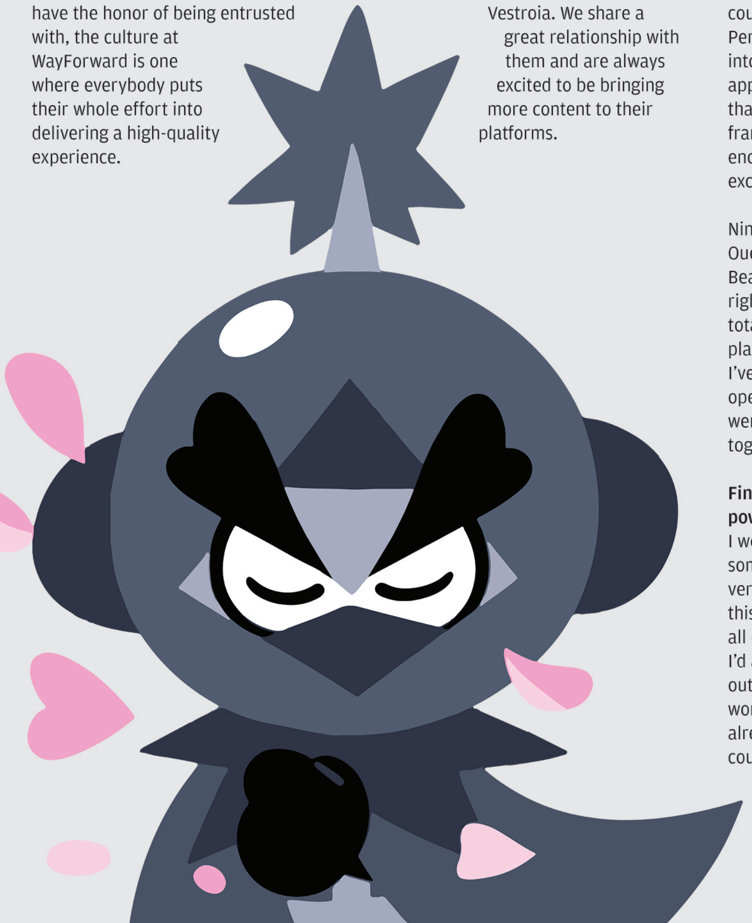
Anyway, you guessed it. I'd love to see Adventure Time: Hey Ice King! Why'd You Steal Our Garbage?!! become available again somehow. I'm not sure how we could make it happen, but it would be super nice to see. Similarly, Wonder Momo: Typhoon Booster holds a special place in my heart, so I'd love to share that with more players too.

As of the time of this interview, we're less than a week out from the joint announcement from Nintendo and WayForward of Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia. Bakugan is yet another IP that has been entrusted to the care of the WayForward team! Is that a foundational part of what makes WayForward what it is? You're the studio that any IP owner can call upon to bring their worlds to life in video game form?
I appreciate you suggesting so, because I really do think of it that way. Regardless of if we're making something homegrown, or a property we have the honor of being entrusted with, the culture at WayForward is one where everybody puts their whole effort into delivering a high-quality experience.

For example, a buddy of mine on the Bakugan team has become so invested, he explained to me that he immersed himself in fan groups to learn facts above and beyond what the average fan knows. In turn, it helped him incorporate references into the game that the most hardcore devotees will appreciate. It's the sort of diligence that might only make a handful of players smile, but that effort is totally worth it.

This might be an oversimplification, but at the end of the day, I view our crew as a bunch of entertainers. Whatever the world we'd like to invite you to, we'll take extra care to make the experience as immersive and fun as possible.

Also, leading up to the Bakugan reveal, Nintendo of America put out a tweet that was quickly spun by fans across forums and social media and had thousands of people guessing that WayForward had been tapped to work on one of Nintendo's first-party brands. What did you think of that commotion? What were some of your favorite guesses from people trying to foresee what a Nintendo/WayForward team-up would be?
I'd like to start by saying how deeply thankful I am that Nintendo extended an opportunity like that to us for unveiling Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia. We share a great relationship with them and are always excited to be bringing more content to their platforms.



The particular day of that announcement was a busy work day for me, so I missed seeing a lot of the hype in the moment. But I was very amused to catch that WayForward was trending on Twitter. It's flattering to know how many people would like to see a team-up between companies, and I, of course, am one of them!

It's not an exaggeration to say practically every major Nintendo franchise is dear to me in one way or another, so the notion of any suggestion already puts a grin on my face. Seeing players everywhere express a desire to have our team involved in any game series that is beloved to them is encouraging too. We'll do our best to present a good reason for WayForward to start trending again someday.

And then the obvious follow-up: If you actually could choose any Nintendo franchise to work with in making a new game, which would it be? What would the game be like?
No way I could pick just one if I could choose any! There's too many games I'd love to explore. Adventures of Lolo is really special to me, of course, so that's always on my mind. Something zany with the characters Wario or even Ashley would be a dream, and totally up our alley. Digging up something ancient like Space Fever or Sheriff would be fun too . . . I really could go on and on with these. Personally, I do tend to want to dive into stuff that's a bit obscure or underappreciated, but it goes without saying that anything related to the big-name franchises would be handled with an enormous amount of reverence and excitement as well.

Lately I've been revisiting the Nintendo DS game Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan and its Western cousin, Elite Beat Agents. Switch seems like the right platform for a return. I could totally picture traditional touchscreen play, as well as moving two Joy-Con. I've been a fan of the original developer iNiS for many years, so . . . if they were ever down to jam on anything together, I'd tell them to get in touch!

Finally, if you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
I would really like the power to create some sort of exact doppelgänger versions of myself. You might think this is so I can relax and have them do all of the work, but that's not it at all. I'd actually just like to multiply my output by accomplishing even more work in the same amount of time. I'm already imagining how many games I could create this way . . . .

BY JONATHAN HOLMES

REVIEWS

The paper version of our favorite plumber has leapt back into action. Read our review of Paper Mario: The Origami King!

A New Adventure Unfolds

PAPER MARIO: THE ORIGAMI KING

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS RATING: E

MORE OF THE same, yet wholly different without being the same as the originals, but enough the same that all can appreciate it. That's my one-sentence review of Paper Mario: The Origami King. This pulpy adventure shares more in common with Color Splash than older Paper Marios, but there are enough throwbacks to the beloved original two games to make it feel like a melding of all the styles.

In this outing, Mario is invited to Peach's castle per normal. This time an origami festival is going on, but it inevitably goes awry when Olly the Origami King starts folding all of the paper people in the Mushroom Kingdom into Folded Soldiers and other designs. He folds Peach, steals her castle and places it on a mountain with powerful streamers that Mario must then follow and shred. The premise is set, but it quickly turns toward the weird – and wonderful!

As Mario seeks each streamer's point of origin, he comes across the Vellumentals: animal spirits that hold incredible elemental-based power. Olly cruelly folded these as well, but defeating them gives Olivia – your companion throughout the adventure – the power to transform into them. (Olivia is a floating origami fairy-type thing that hovers near Mario and often spouts sincere but head-smackingly naive dialogue in most situations. Despite initially finding her annoying, I grew to like her and what she brought to the story.) With her new powers, Olivia can then open the unique roadblocks in each area and find the end of each streamer.

This is where the weird comes in. Each "streamer boss" is an art supply. Yeah. You read that right. You'll be fighting baddies like Colored Pencils, Rubber Band and . . . Tape. It really must be seen to be believed.

The crux of the gameplay is the battles, and there are a few different types. Regular battles all take place in a ring arena that Mario can manipulate by pulling sections or spinning rings. The object is to line the enemies up for a jump or hammer attack. While early battles are very easy to line up, later battles like to overwhelm you with a bunch of enemies. If you manage to solve the puzzle in the time limit (which can be expanded through items), you'll get a boost of attack power. This is often key to survival, as if you fail to solve it, the enemies can really take a toll on your hit points. A plethora of healing items are available early and throughout the adventure, but it can still be quite difficult.

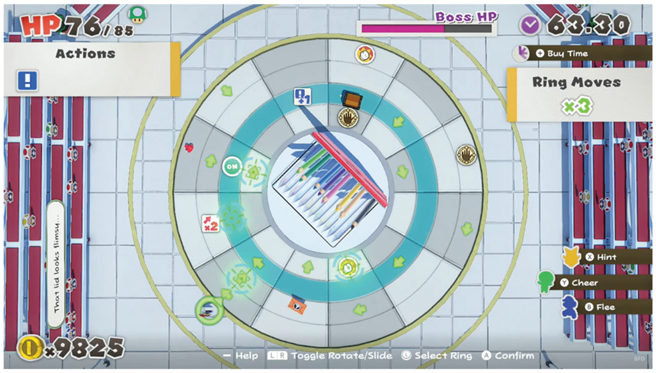
Wave battles have multiple puzzles and enemies; they can be long, but not insurmountable.

Boss battles are wild. They still take place in the ring arena, but they require Mario to follow arrows along a path you build to get to specific attack positions or special spots like 1,000-Fold Arms rings. These rings need to be activated by finding the On button, and you often have to avoid an attack or some obstacle the boss presents in order to hit it. It can also be frustrating to align them when the bosses are vulnerable, and the attacks can be devastating, even with blocking.

The series' staple of timed hits that boost your blocks and attacks with well-timed button presses is still in place here, and optional items like Fire Flowers, Tails and POW Blocks can be used to help get the win. Sounds complicated, but it's very satisfying, fresh and challenging.

The locales are great. A forest, a desert, a feudal Japan-themed amusement park, a cruise ship, a spa and more await Mario with fun puzzles and quirky plot points. Confetti that Mario carries fills in the holes in the environment left behind by King Olly's forces. This is much like repainting the white spots in Color Splash, and there are plenty of these holes, as well as Toads, coin blocks and treasures to find all over.

In almost every location, a companion joins Mario for a short while and provides some crucial plot points. Bob-omb (who Olivia desperately wants to name), Professor Toad and



even the conniving Kamek all join Mario and, at times, help him in battle. The interactions with these side characters are fantastic. Even though they don't rise to the level of past partners like Goombario, Admiral Bobbery or Vivian to name a few, their stories are necessary, touching and great.

There are unmissable moments in this game apart from the companions' plots, too. I'll try not to spoil anything, but a portion of the game has a heavy Wind Waker/Phantom Hourglass vibe, and even makes direct reference to Zelda themes and tropes. The parts with Luigi are great. The plight of Bowser's castle and his minions is hilarious. The origami character design is really something to behold. (Befold?)

It isn't all streamers and confetti, though. There are certain parts of the game where instant death is a possibility. Most players will feel cheated by making a wrong choice that leads to this miserable end. The game doesn't set you back very far, but those moments felt unwelcome in a Mario game.

The difficulty, at times, may miss its target demographic. Some younger kids may find certain portions too difficult.

The copious item collecting can be very frustrating, even with the aid of bells and radar items.

There's a fair amount of handholding, but at other times I didn't understand something until late in the game.

The music can be drab at times and rely too heavily on ambience.

While the origami is great, there isn't a lot of variety in the bestiary.

The companion thing, while fun, felt like a bit of a tease. Nintendo has to know that players want more of the first two games' style of companions. Just commit!

. . . And that's the end of the list of complaints. If you liked Paper Mario: Color Splash, chances are you'll find this one just as fun and be able to look past all of those shortcomings. If you're looking for a return to the originals, you'll be disappointed – but only just. This is a worthy standalone title, and its story is great. Don't miss it! **– BRETT**

8.5

SECOND OPINION
CONSTRAINTS BREED CREATIVITY

WE FOCUSED OUR last issue, "Bent Out of Shape," on the ongoing frustration some Paper Mario series fans have felt in recent years. They want new sequels in the series to be more like the first game from the N64, or, better yet, the absolutely adored Thousand-Year Door from the GameCube. But Nintendo won't deliver. Rather, each new game in the line instead seems to center itself on some new experimental gameplay idea – and beloved partner characters seem to be a thing of the past, as NPC designs that once were wildly varied have been radically reined in.

Well, that's exactly what's happened. Kensuke Tanabe, the producer of Paper Mario: The Origami King, has confirmed in a new interview with VGC that the series' developers are no longer allowed to modify Mario characters or to create new characters that touch on the Mario universe. Then, in a separate interview with GamesRadar, Tanabe said the Paper Mario team cannot "graphically represent individual characteristics" in the Toad NPCs. So there it is.

Now, the debate over whether or not it was right for the higher-ups at Nintendo to impose these kinds of restrictions could fill a whole 'nother NF issue, so I won't get into that here. Instead, I want to spend this space applauding the efforts of Mr. Tanabe and his team. Because, given the limitations placed upon them, they've still managed to create a great Paper Mario adventure here.

It reminds me of indie developers who purposefully restrict themselves to the old NES color palette while making modern pixel-art games. Or the artists crafting new Game Boy games using GB Studio. Or, sticking with Game Boy, how about the musicians still making new songs today entirely within the constraints of its sound hardware?

Go beyond games and consider any other medium of art. There are wonderful sculptures and paintings made by creators who were held back by circumstance or by choice from being able to use all the materials they might have wanted to have access to. There are countless YouTubers doing great work without the fanciest cameras or best editing software. Even this magazine is constrained – we have limited page space to work with, limited word counts for our articles – and we do the best we can every time out.

OK, OK, I'll step down from the soapbox. What I'm getting at is that, within the framework Mr. Tanabe was assigned, he and his team still managed to create a truly memorable new entry in this storied series. Would it have been better if the bigwigs just said, "Hey, go wild! All bets are off! Do whatever you want!" Maybe, or maybe not. Like James said back in the Interview this time, making Vitamin Connection was more difficult since it was a blank slate to begin with. Having a set framework before they got started might have helped make The Origami King a little more magical. **– LUCAS**

8.5

8.5

Proven to Be Truly Timeless

CLUBHOUSE GAMES: 51 WORLDWIDE CLASSICS

SUPER MARIO BROS. has proven itself to have remarkable longevity, as its appeal has endured for 35 years now. But will it hold up for 10 times that long? *100 times!?* Three and a half decades may seem like a long time now, but such a span of success is just the beginning for any game that hopes to become one of humanity's all-time favorites.

Nintendo has recently provided this point of reference directly, through the release of Clubhouse Games: 51 Worldwide Classics. This compilation contains pastimes that have been passed down through time – some games that are literally millennia old, having originated in civilizations that they've long since outlived. That's some serious staying power! And, luckily, this collection of these ageless artifacts modernizes each and every one beautifully.

That's not to say the way these games play has been modernized at all – no, their original rules remain intact and authentic. Rather, the modernization comes in through the way each game is presented, specifically through the guidance that's offered in order to teach newcomers how to pick up and play any game in the bunch. A small cast of fully voiced host characters introduce each one when you select it, there are visual overlays like arrows and highlighted pieces to help you once you begin to play, and then there are hints to further help you move toward mastery once you've got a few rounds under your belt. And all those things are optional, too, so if you're already a veteran poker player or chessmaster you can just dive right in.

I loved this accessibility. I'd never taken the time to sit down and learn some old classics like Backgammon and Mancala, but now I've mastered them!

. . . Well, at least against the A.I. opponents that Clubhouse Games provides. That's where things get inconsistent, because some games' computer-controlled rival players seem to be absolute geniuses, while others are just plain dumb. Take the Chess A.I., for example. I'm no slouch when it comes to the game of kings, but I know I'm not as good as this version makes me seem. I steamrolled my way through the Normal, Hard, Amazing and Impossible opponents with no trouble at all, because even on the Impossible setting they would do ridiculous things like sacrificing their queen for no reason within the first few moves.

On the other hand, the Darts A.I. may be unbeatable. It throws constant bullseyes even on its easiest setting, and makes that game unfun for the opposite reason.

Thankfully, many – maybe even most – of the games feature acceptably balanced opposition. And you're really meant to pass a Joy-Con to a friend or three to play many of these games in multiplayer mode anyway.

That's another area where this collection shines. Our family loves board games, but it's often a hassle to keep all the separate boxes cleaned up and organized. With Clubhouse Games, Carter and Calvin have been able to set the Switch up in Tabletop Mode, take two Joy-Cons in their hands and happily bounce from game to game. Then, when it's time to "clean up," all they have to do is snap the 'Cons back on and power down the console.

Having so many great, timeless classics all together and so easy to pick up and put down at a moment's notice is spectacular. I'm thankful to Nintendo for reviving this brand, and at this time! Maybe Clubhouse Games itself will see its appeal endure for 35 years – or more! (Just not the Darts part. That A.I. cheats.) **– LUCAS**

SWITCH PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RATING: E

MANCALA

The first game listed, and one of the oldest enduring game designs in all of human history. I never took the time to learn Mancala before now, but I love all the strategy that arises from simply shuffling beans into oval-shaped boxes around the board.

BACKGAMMON

Like Mancala, Backgammon is a long-time classic that's been enjoyed by generations . . . and Clubhouse Games has finally taught me how to play! The optional Assist mode is wonderful for helping you to get your bearings and to understand which moves are valid to make.

SHOGI

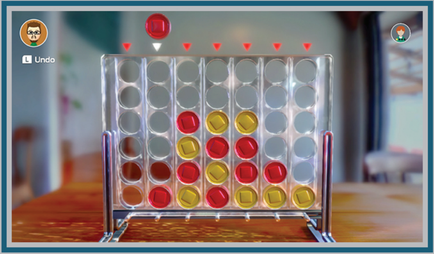
By far, though, the built-in help in Clubhouse Games is invaluable for learning truly complex strategic board games like Shogi. I'm thrilled to have a better understanding of it now, as its rule that allows you to deploy captured pieces on your own side is intriguing.

LUDO

A Thomas family favorite that goes by many different names when you see it for sale in stores: Aggravation; Frustration; Trouble. There's no plastic bubble in the middle of the board keeping the die locked inside, but other than that it's the same game you know.

A TOP 11 OUT OF THE FULL 51

NF faithful, I have decided to spare you all from my original idea for this review . . . which was going to be me individually reviewing all 51 of the 51 Worldwide Classics across something like 10 pages in a row. Personally I would have loved to indulge in such an over-the-top and utterly unnecessary endeavor, but then I figured our patrons probably wouldn't appreciate us using 12% of an entire issue's allotted page space for what would still ultimately be a single product review. (No promises for the future. NF's surely going to get even nuttier as we go.) So! Instead! Here is my reined-in list of the 11 games I've had the most fun with so far, all neatly housed within one sidebar. You're welcome.



FOUR-IN-A-ROW

In fact, several of the games included in this collection are "generic" versions of games that are much better known by brand names these days. Here's Connect 4, but in order to keep Hasbro's lawyers from calling up Nintendo to complain, it's got a different name.

SLOT CARS

The most laughter was earned from my sons by this accurate simulation of a real tabletop slot car racetrack – because, as anyone who's played with a real tabletop slot car racetrack knows, it's hilarious to punch the throttle and watch the cars go flying off at the corners!

TANKS

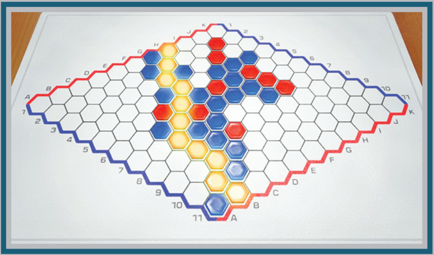
Not every game in the bunch is a traditional card or board game. Some trace their origins to Nintendo's designers themselves, like good old Tanks! It's back for an encore after being a stand-out hit in 2007's Wii Play. (Though that was inspired, in turn, by 1977's Combat.)

BOWLING

Speaking of past Nintendo hits, how about Wii Sports Bowling, the game that's still to this day getting regular play on many of the millions of Wii units sold to casual gamers two generations ago. This Clubhouse version is a superb update that uses Joy-Con motion control.

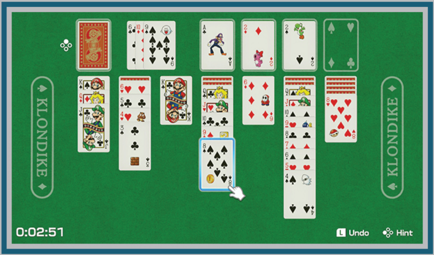
BILLIARDS

I was lucky enough to grow up in a home with a pool table in the basement, and so I know a thing or two about cue sticks. The Clubhouse take on billiards is probably the best video game version I've ever played, as it offers sensitive control over shot power and great alignment graphics to held you set up your shots.



HEX

I'm pleased with the progress I've made in learning the ins and outs of games like Backgammon and Mancala since I started playing Clubhouse Games . . . but then there are still several games here I've yet to make much headway with. A consistent winning strategy for Hex eludes me so far. But I will not be deterred!



SOLITAIRE

Finally, sometimes you just want to sit and while away a few minutes with a staple. Clubhouse Games offers both Klondike and Spider Solitaire, and all of the card games can be played with an (easily) unlockable deck of cards featuring Super Mario series characters! Truly, any card game is enhanced by the presence of Waluigi.

REVIEW CONTINUED FROM ISSUE #42

Still in the Works a Year Later

BLOODSTAINED: RITUAL OF THE NIGHT

NEARLY A YEAR AGO, we published a review-in-progress of Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night – with the promise of returning once developer ArtPlay had fixed some of its more obscene hitches. My conclusion at the time was that Bloodstained was a fine successor to Symphony of the Night, but though I personally felt it could be enjoyed from start to finish as it was, others may not have been as willing to suffer through all the bugs, slowdown and muddy textures.

We get that ports to Nintendo hardware will never be as impressive as versions on higher-spec machines. The least we can hope for is that they run well and offer comparable bells and whistles to their supercharged cousins. Bloodstained on Switch failed to meet those standards, resulting in the frustrating game of catch-up that continues to this day.

There have been several updates in the intervening months to boost performance. Input lag has been reduced, as has loading, though some room transitions still take an uncomfortably long time. Slowdown in large areas, namely the Towers of the Twin Dragons, has not quite been eliminated, but no longer do these zones run like slideshows. And texture resolution has improved enough that Poltergeists (haunted portraits of Kickstarter backers) now have discernible facial features while playing in Handheld Mode.

There are further tweaks that ArtPlay could crank out in the near future – like speeding up lip syncing so that character dialogue doesn't end before their mouths stop flapping! Still, short of rebuilding the entire game from the ground up specifically for Switch, there is no way to fix everything wrong with this beast. Chalk that up to the short turnaround time to release from the announcement of a Switch version following Bloodstained's cancellation on Wii U. Best take what we can!

Not all updates have been technical – let's talk new stretch goal content, beginning with the ability to play as Zangetsu! As in Symphony of the Night's Richter Mode, the gravelly voiced swordsman is a brutal beast who wields a range of techniques that grant you access to the entire castle from the start. The trade-off is that the campaign lacks cutscenes, treasure chests and ability power-ups for a more streamlined affair – but after struggling as Miriam and managing her mountain of equipment and spell systems, a Zangetsu run is like a well-earned spa treatment!

The other new addition is the Randomizer, which replaces the Roguelike mode originally promised in the Kickstarter (but scrapped due to difficulty in implementation). Inspired by ROM hacks of games like Super Metroid and A Link to the Past in which the locations of key items have been shuffled, Randomizer allows players to customize their playthrough parameters, such as rearranged save room locations or different Shards from defeated enemies. Only those who've mastered the main game should dare mess around with this outrageous remix dispensary! (*You* try beating Vepar with just dainty kicks when RNG decides not to bestow any weapons throughout the Galleon Minerva!)

Many features remain in store, like a Classic Mode and a third playable character, all while Switch players anxiously await further code polish. Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night is a good game, don't get me wrong, but boy, waiting for it to become great has been a job in itself! **– TONY**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: 505 GAMES
DEVELOPERS: ARTPLAY, DICO, WAYFORWARD & DISRUPTIVE GAMES
RATING: T

Back at the Old Homestead

STORY OF SEASONS: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN

I WAS DISAPPOINTED to hear that the first mainline Story of Seasons game for the Switch would be a remake, but when I learned it was a remake of the Friends of Mineral Town duology, I was relieved. Before we were bogged down with systems like bazaars, contests and trios of towns, there was Mineral Town, which had everything that a single young farmer would want for the simple life: mountains, forests, a beach and a small town full of friendly people.

Overall, the environment's design is clear and colorful, although I would have liked the outlines Doraemon: Story of Seasons used to indicate interactive items here too – it's hard to tell whether flowers and crops like sweet potatoes are pickable or just part of the scenery, unless you're a series regular. The one thing that could've looked better were the human character models: They remind me of Sanrio characters, and not in a good way, especially after seeing how detailed they could get on the small screens of the Nintendo DS and 3DS.

The default control scheme has your farmer moving with the left Joy-Con and the tool pocket accessible by the left face buttons, while the right Joy-Con accesses your bag. Flick it to open it, then use the Joy-Con to select what it is you want to hold – very quick and easy, and you don't have to contend with pop-up menus. The icons for the tool pocket and your current bag capacity are always tucked into the bottom corners of your screen, while saving or consulting in-game information is a button press away. Overall, the lack of a second screen doesn't hurt things a bit.

While the main structure of the story (grandchild from the big city goes back to Grandpa's small town farm they visited one summer as a kid) and the farming mechanics have largely remained the same, there have been updates to bring the mechanics into modern times (no more planting your crops in a C formation, for one!). There are also new crops, new animals (flavored milk cows!) and two new singles in town. Your coop and barn now have bells to automatically call your animals out to graze (although they still love to get in your way), and your bag can be upgraded to an even higher capacity than the original. Actual mining has also returned.

The updated mechanic I had the most trouble with was getting pets on your farm: They need to be unlocked, and then they're only sold for one day each season. They're not as essential as they've been in previous titles, however, so it's no big loss unless you really want a furry (or feathery!) friend on your farm.

The friendship and romancing system has also gotten a few updates: Same-sex relationships and weddings have now made their proper debut (the Japanese version of Harvest Moon DS Cute implemented a "best friends" system that didn't make the Western cut). It's great to see inclusion and the relationship dialogue doesn't feel canned, no matter who you're dating.

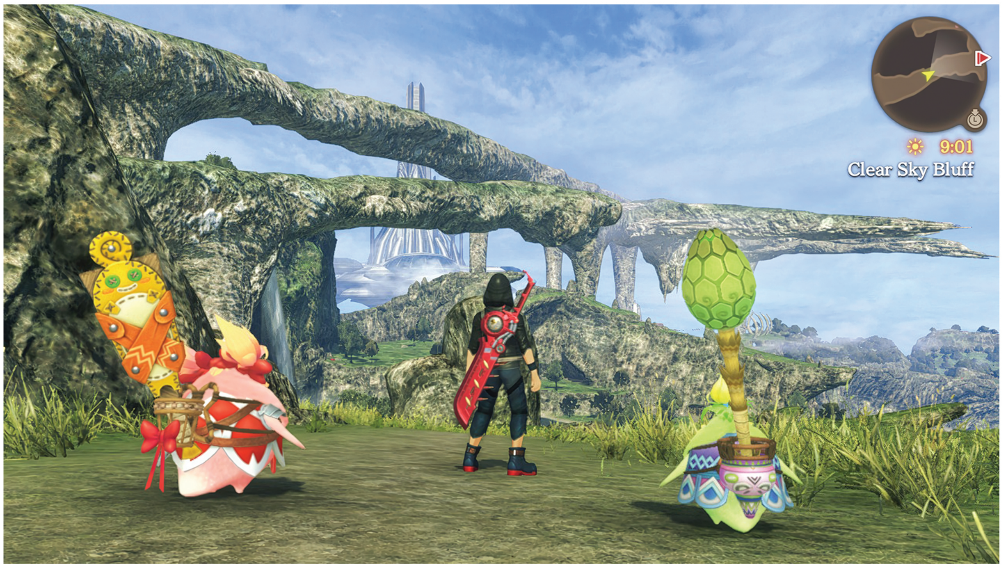
On the flip side, rival relationships and marriages (which haven't appeared in the mainline games for several titles) were not included in the remake. I'm disappointed that we no longer get to see them, because seeing the other singles of Mineral Town fall in love and marry each other was one thing that kept the everyday action from going stale.

As for my recommendation, if you were a fan of the original Friends of Mineral Town titles, this is a great dose of nostalgia, with plenty of quality-of-life improvements over the original and a fresh new localization. However, Stardew Valley and Rune Factory 4 Special have so much more to offer in terms of activities, story and interaction (with Stardew Valley still getting content updates, even). Despite that, maybe a return to the simple life is exactly what you're looking for. **– REBECCA**

7.5

SWITCH PUBLISHER: XSEED
DEVELOPER: MARVELOUS
RATING: E10+

REVIEW CONTINUED FROM ISSUE #47



There's More to Explore

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES: DEFINITIVE EDITION

SWITCH PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: MONOLITH SOFT
RATING: T

I DID IT.

Finally, officially and without having to retreat to YouTube when a late-game boss got the best of me, I have at long last completed a full run of Xenoblade Chronicles, start to finish – and brought down the final boss with a Back Slash to boot! It was a moment many years in the making, and now that it's happened I wonder whether I'd subconsciously sabotaged myself in playthroughs in the past simply because I wasn't ready for this journey to end. This time, though? I rolled the credits with confidence, because I knew there was more content to come: the all-new epilogue "extra story," Xenoblade Chronicles: Future Connected!

That's what I want to focus on here. The main game is a masterpiece and you can make a full-price purchase of this Definitive Edition knowing you'll get more than your money's worth with its campaign alone, but Future Connected is the cherry on top that puts the whole package *over* the top. It's purely delightful. It's a joy.

Picking up the story one year after the events of the main game, our sometimes shirtless Monado master Shulk teams up with magical princess Melia once again and flies off to explore the Bionis' Shoulder – an area originally planned to be included as part of the primary quest years ago, but which was cut at some point fairly late in development. The dev team has masterfully resurrected this nearly finished zone, finally actually finished it and given it the starring role in this new, standalone 15-ish hour tale. This area is a blast to explore, as it's larger, more detailed and more interwoven with unique points of interest than any previous part of the Bionis' body from before. If this extra adventure only offered this extra area for Shulk and Melia to experience, that would have been enough for me! But things just get better from there.

. . . Thanks to Kino and Nene! These two upstart Nopon – two of Riki's many children – stow away on Shulk's ship and quickly become the backbone of his new adventuring party. They are jubilant, hilarious, brilliantly voice-acted and easily double the already adorable appeal of their father from the main game.

But they're not alone! There are a dozen other intrepid Nopon who also join the team in supporting roles: the Ponspectors, a group of treasure-seeking land surveyors who are on the Shoulder already before Shulk gets there. They've all been separated from one another, though, and it's your job to find them all and reunite their group. As you do, they all begin to tag along, one by one, and they actually play a role in battle! Chain Attacks have been eliminated, replaced instead by the Ponspectors' Union Strikes. These are wildly comical cutscene-summoning assaults that can cause massive damage – if you time your button inputs correctly while their cute cutscene plays.

That was another surprise. I didn't think a tagged-on epilogue would actually alter aspects of the main game's gameplay – but they really went all-out here! And Union Strikes aren't the only new feature. Shulk also has access to new Monado skills that didn't appear in the main game: a party-wide physical defense boost called Monado Armour, as well as Monado Eater, which rips away enemies' buffs and leaves them with a Bleed status to add injury to the insult. Melia gains more spirits to summon as well (though I confess to not using her as much in the active battle party of three, since I was so enamored by Nene and Kino!).

The story also cuts no corners. This is a proper follow-up to the main game, particularly in continuing Melia's storyline – and, thankfully, Jenna Coleman returned to voice Melia once again, as did Adam Howden for Shulk. Jenna in particular has become

a much bigger star in both television and film since she first recorded Melia's lines for the European Wii localization of the first version of Xenoblade nearly a decade ago, so it's wonderful that she was able to return and ensure complete consistency with Melia's character in voiced cutscenes (and there are many of them!).

The supporting cast is also great, there are tweaks to how certain quests are handled that improve their presentation, the new music in the environment and in battle stands easily alongside the original legendary soundtrack . . . Future Connected is a wonderful time. I'm shocked that an extra story of this high a caliber was included in the Definitive Edition essentially for free when it could very well have been sold as standalone DLC. The value of the entire XCDE package is undeniable as a result.

I find myself struggling to assign a final score, as I recognize there are flaws and imperfections here. The world is still rendered with Wii-era geometry, as I mentioned last time, and the enemy characters likewise retain their lower-poly look from that older generation. That's most evident in large foes, like the giant Orlugas who lumber across the land with basically big blocky rectangles for arms. There are some technical quirks here and there as well — like, sometimes I'd be in the middle of a battle and the battle would just end, with the enemy leaving and returning to their starting position on the map, like they somehow forgot they were in the middle of fighting for their life.

Still, I can't deny the days of smiles this game has given me. Playing a glorious, HD, lovingly upgraded version of the original adventure over a course of 60 or so hours, then getting to follow that up with an extra 15 spent exploring an all-new area and meeting brand-new characters . . . it's actually been difficult to make it even happen here in this season of life, with my four boys at home around the clock day in and day out. But I'm so thankful I fought through and did it. This has been a delight in a dark time in humanity's history. I'll score it accordingly. — **LUCAS**

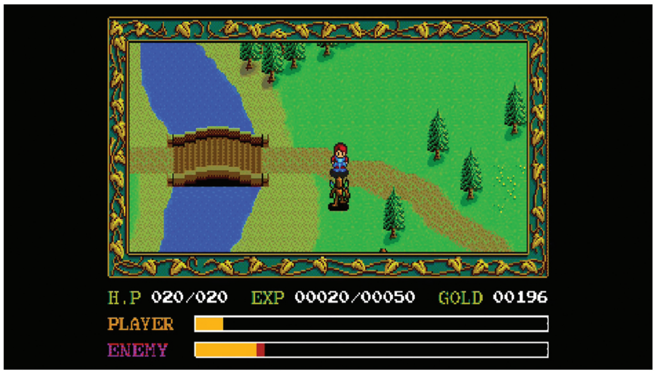
10

A NEW LITTLE HEROPON IN TRAINING
KINO

While Riki remains the Nopon people's Heropon one year after his quest alongside his sidekick Shulk, his son Kino is eager to inherit the title . . . if he can overcome his shyness and gain some confidence in his own skills, that is! Kino doesn't take after his Dad in fighting style, though. Rather, he's studied Sharla's moveset! That makes him the team's new healer, wielding his ether-blasting weapon to sometimes deal damage to enemies, but most often to restore health to his allies. In fact, all of Kino's Arts are directly copied from Sharla — they're given new names, but have all the same functionality. That makes Kino a little less unique than he could have been on the gameplay side of things, but on the other hand it makes Future Connected easier to get into right away. It doesn't diminish his heart or his cuteness, though! Kino is non-defeatable!

HIS PROTECTIVE BIGSISTERPON
NENE

Compensating for Kino's mild manners and meekness, his bigsisterpon Nene charges full-force into the spotlight without hesitation, always ready to smack down any enemy she sees! Nene is brave, strong and sure of herself, and she attributes her tenacity to following the example of her father, Riki. (Riki doesn't appear in Future Connected directly, but his character is nonetheless developed much more by the stories Nene and Kino tell about him. He's an amazing Dad.) Nene doesn't borrow her Pop's moves in battle either, though. She's a student of Reyn! She's the new team tank, pulling aggro, soaking up damage and smiling all the while. Even better, her Arts' names are even funnier versions of Reyn's: He had Mad Taunt, but she has Glad Taunt. He had Rage, but Nene gets Hangry. She's a superstar, and she's always there for her little brother!



The Bronze Medalist Returns

THE TURBOGRAFX-16 MINI

WHEN THE NES launched in 1985, it became the new undisputed king of all video game systems – though there was one little console that came close to dethroning it. In Japan, for a brief time, an upstart challenger in the market called the PC Engine actually managed to outsell the Famicom (the Japanese NES). Rebranded as the "TurboGrafx-16" in the United States, it was also the first home console to wear its amount of "bits" right on its sleeve. This was a move that would later be copied by Sega with the 32X and Nintendo with the N64.

Yet, despite its copious amounts of muscle, a long list of compelling exclusives and, eventually, a CD-ROM add-on (beating the Sega CD plug-in by two years), the TurboGrafx-16 still tanked. Most blame this on its poorly timed release (it launched in America two weeks after Sega released the more powerful Genesis console) and its host of exclusives that felt strange to many Westerners. Just look at Ys Book I & II, one of the TurboGrafx-CD's biggest games: in Japan, it was met with open arms, setting the groundwork for a franchise that's still going to this day. Here in the States, most folks took one look at the box, said "What the heck is an 'Ys'?" and immediately moved on to Mega Man, Mario or Sonic.

So, do you want to know what an "Ys" is? If so, the TurboGrafx-16 Mini may be for you – but only if you're truly open to a foreign experience. In fact, more than half of the games here are still in Japanese! Its built-in library of games is split between TG16 mode (all presented in English) and PC Engine mode (still in their native language), so chances are, there's a lot here that even fans of the original systems haven't played. Now that the Virtual Console is toast, this is the only legal way to purchase most of these titles for HDMI-compatible hardware.

At $100 new, the TurboGrafx-16 Mini may feel a little overpriced, but considering it includes 52 unique games, it's actually a pretty amazing haul. Leading the pack you have Bonk, the console's mascot, who stars in two games here (three if you count Air Zonk, the futuristic spin-off), which all hold up great. Before Yoshi the dinosaur fluttered through the air on his Island, Bonk was flipping his way across a prehistoric landscape, beating his huge, hard head against all forms of Jurassic beasts and inanimate objects. His games are sure to be crowd-pleasers for old and new players alike.

From there, the games definitely get more obscure, and sometimes, even more fun. Military Madness is a turn-based strategy game that can hold its own against any Fire Emblem. Castlevania: Rondo of Blood is largely considered the best pre-Metroidvania title in the franchise. The yucky antics of Splatterhouse, the Dario Argento-meets-Friday the 13th horror title, still make me squirm even today. Hideo Kojima's Snatcher, while still unavailable in English, is hugely important to gaming history, and if you play it alongside a translation walkthrough, it's a lot of fun as well. There's also interesting takes on Ninja Gaiden, Ghouls & Ghosts, Bomberman and Adventure Island. Cycling through these tiles is like strolling through an old folks' home for semi-retired action game mascots. Some you'll instantly recognize. Others you won't.

After you get through the cult hits, you're mostly left with shmups. Some, like Cho Aniki, R-Type, Lords of Thunder, Dragon Spirit, Star Parodier, Gradius II, Salamander and Blazing Lazers, are considered some of the best of all time. Others, like Spriggan, Aldynes and Ginga Fukei Densetsu Sapphire are less well known, but more than make up for it with the feeling of newness that comes from playing them for the first time.

My only real knock against the TurboGrafx-16 Mini comes from what it's missing. Pinball horror title Alien Crush made the cut, but Devil's Crush, its superior sequel, was left in the cold. Likewise, the losses of Far East of Eden, Valis II, Legendary Axe 1 and 2, Keith Courage in Alpha Zones and Bloody Wolf are significant.

There are also some problems with the emulation. While there are plenty of display options, they all offer some distortion. Even on the most "loyal" setting, if you get close enough to the screen you'll see that the eyes of the main character in Ys are now slightly different sizes. It's something that only pixel artists will probably notice, but it still left me wondering "Y" they couldn't get this right.

Otherwise, though, I have no complaints. I especially appreciate all the new graphics, music and functionality that went into the user interface. There's even a handful of secrets to be unlocked if you hold Select before booting up a few games. The hardware is also top-notch, complete with built-in turbo buttons (though the back of the system is so true to the source material you may need a FAQ in order to plug in the HDMI cables). It all adds up to a package that's a worthwhile purchase for anyone who's interested in this underdog console that almost led the pack through a bygone era of gaming. **– JONATHAN**

9.0

TG16 PUBLISHER: KONAMI
DEVELOPER: M2 RATING: M

ARCHIVE

The complete list of Nintendo Force retail reviews from the past two years. Scores reflect individual reviewers' opinions.

SWITCH

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
AI: The Somnium Files	8.5	Tony	#44
Animal Crossing: New Horizons	9.0	Rebecca	#46
Astral Chain	8.5	Jonathan	#42
Blade Strangers	7.0	Jonathan	#36
BurgerTime Party!	8.0	Lucas	#44
Contra: Rogue Corps	7.0	David	#43
Crash Team Racing: Nitro-Fueled	8.0	David	#41
Crystal Crisis	9.0	Jonathan	#40
Daemon X Machina	7.0	Chris	#42
Dark Souls: Remastered	8.0	Chris	#37
Diablo III: Eternal Collection	9.0	Nadia	#37
Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth – Complete Edition	8.5	Josh	#44
Dragon Ball FighterZ	8.0	Tony	#36
Dragon Quest Builders 2	9.0	Shesez	#41
Dragon Quest XI S: Echoes of an Elusive Age – Definitive Edition	9.5	Lucas	#43
Dreamworks Dragons: Dawn of New Riders	7.5	David	#39
Fire Emblem: Three Houses	9.5	Lucas	#41
Fitness Boxing	5.5	Chris	#38
Friday the 13th: The Game – Ultimate Slasher Edition	8.0	Kevin C.	#46
Ghostbusters: The Video Game Remastered	7.5	Brett	#43
Guacamelee! One-Two Punch Collection	9.0	Jonathan	#42
Heroland	7.0	Rebecca	#45
Ice Age: Scrat's Nutty Adventure!	5.0	Chris	#45
Indivisible	7.0	Tony	#47
Katamari Damacy REROLL	9.5	Tony	#38
Langrisser I & II	8.5	David	#46
Layton's Mystery Journey: Katrielle and the Millionaires' Conspiracy – Deluxe Edition	8.5	Brett	#45
LEGO DC Super-Villains	8.0	Thor	#38
Little Dragons Café	7.0	Rebecca	#36
Luigi's Mansion 3	9.0	Chris	#44
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games: Tokyo 2020	8.5	David	#44
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 3: The Black Order	7.0	Brett	#41
Mega Man 11	11/13	David	#36
Mega Man Zero/ZX Legacy Collection	9.0	David	#45
Model Debut #nicola	7.0	Rebecca	#44
Monster Boy and the Cursed Kingdom	8.5	David	#38
Monster Hunter Generations Ultimate	7.5	Kevin K.	#37
Moonlighter	8.0	Lucas	#39
Moving Out	8.0	Lucas	#47
My Time at Portia	5.5	Chris	#40
Namco Museum Arcade Pac	7.0	Brett	#38
New Super Lucky's Tale	9.0	David	#44
New Super Mario Bros. U Deluxe	8.0	Lucas	#38
Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	9.0	Brett	#43
Nickelodeon Kart Racers	5.0	David	#37
Nintendo Labo Vehicle Kit	8.5	Lucas	#36
Nintendo Labo VR Kit	9.0	Lucas	#40
Paw Patrol: On a Roll	8.5	Lucas	#37
Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! & Let's Go, Eevee!	8.5	Lucas	#37
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Rescue Team DX	8.0	Lucas	#46
Pokémon Shield	9.0	Thor	#44
Pokémon Sword	8.0	Lucas	#44
Ring Fit Adventure	8.5	Matthew T.	#44
Rune Factory 4 Special	7.5	Rebecca	#46
Scribblenauts Mega Pack	7.5	David	#37
Sega Genesis Classics	8.5	Brett	#38
Shining Resonance Refrain	7.0	Neal	#36
SNK 40th Anniversary Collection	8.5	Thor	#38
Snack World: The Dungeon Crawl – Gold	6.0	Brett	#45
Spyro Reignited Trilogy	9.0	David	#42
Star Wars Pinball	9.0	Lucas	#42
Starlink: Battle for Atlas	8.5	David	#37
Super Dragon Ball Heroes: World Mission	6.0	Tony	#40
Super Mario Maker 2	10	Tony	#41
Super Mario Party	9.0	Lucas	#36
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz	7.5	David	#44
Super Smash Bros. Ultimate	10	Lucas	#37
Team Sonic Racing	8.5	David	#41
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening	9.5	Jonathan	#43
The Ninja Saviors: Return of the Warriors	7.0	Jonathan	#44
The Nintendo Switch Lite	9.0	Matthew L.	#43
The Outer Worlds	8.0	Matthew L.	#47
The Sega Genesis Mini	9.0	David	#43
The Wonderful 101: Remastered	9.0	Jonathan	#47
The World Ends With You: Final Remix	6.5	Rebecca	#37
Tokyo Mirage Sessions #FE Encore	7.5	Matthew L.	#46
Travis Strikes Again: No More Heroes	8.0	Jonathan	#38
Trials of Mana	8.5	Brett	#47
Trine 4: The Nightmare Prince	9.0	Lucas	#44
Valkyria Chronicles 4	8.5	Neal	#36
Wolfenstein: Youngblood	7.0	Chris	#41
Xenoblade Chronicles 2: Torna ~ The Golden Country	8.5	Kevin K.	#36
Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair	9.0	Tony	#43
Yoshi's Crafted World	7.5	Lucas	#39
Ys VIII: Lacrimosa of DANA	9.5	Lucas	#36

3DS

TITLE	SCORE	REVIEWER	ISSUE
Etrian Odyssey Nexus	8.5	Nadia	#39
Kirby's Extra Epic Yarn	7.5	Neal	#39
Luigi's Mansion	8.0	Neal	#36
Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story + Bowser Jr.'s Journey	9.0	Neal	#38
Persona Q2: New Cinema Labyrinth	8.0	Matthew L.	#40
Yo-kai Watch 3	8.5	Lucas	#39
Yo-kai Watch Blasters: Red Cat Corps & White Dog Squad	6.5	Lucas	#37

REVIEW REMINDER
SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

AS WE ANTICIPATE returning to the 3D World, let's take a moment to remember our review of its original Wii U version! Written by Neal Ronaghan, it appeared all the way back in NF #6, the same issue that starred this same cool cast of cats on its cover.

Kicking off his evaluation, Neal said that Super Mario 3D World had some big shoes to fill, since it had to succeed as a successor to three separate Super Mario experiences. First, it had to work as a direct follow-up to the excellent 3DS adventure Super Mario 3D Land. Second, it had to carry on the mainline console line after the previous generation's great Galaxy games. And lastly, it had to live up to the legacy of Super Mario Bros. 2, since it was calling back to that NES classic in particular by making the whole quartet of Mario, Luigi, Peach and Toad all playable once more. Said Neal, "All of those semi-disparate flavors of Mario put a lot of pressure on Super Mario 3D World to live up to the series' legacy. Fortunately, it does just that. Super Mario 3D World is a delicious, creative feast that sets a new standard for the future of Mario."

His 9.0-scored review carried on with even more praise after that. And, well, I'll just let his conclusion speak for itself again: "Super Mario 3D World successfully fuses multiple styles of Mario games into one spectacular effort. It's wonderfully imaginative from start to finish, often introducing new and surprising ideas in one level, then putting something even more amazing into the next one. Outside of a few small issues, 3D World is a triumph that delivers the warm, happy feeling of playing something so outlandish and amusing that the only natural reaction is to sit back, sheepishly grin and climb up a flagpole in a cat suit waiting for the inevitable Mario 'meow!'." **– LUCAS**

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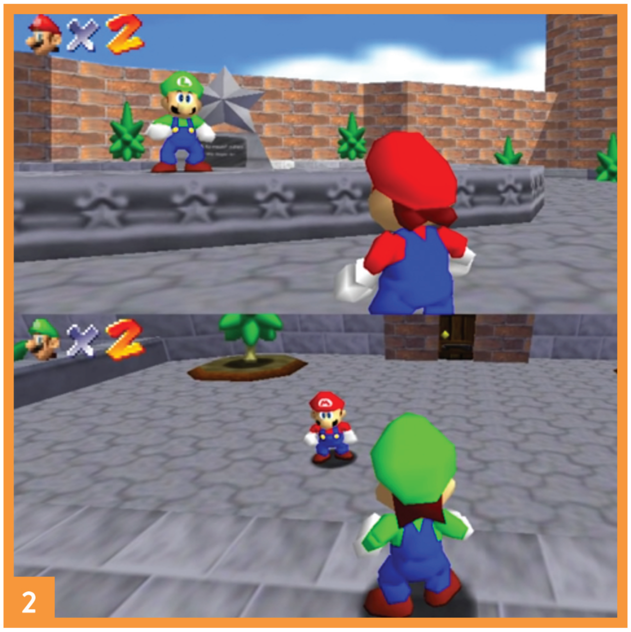

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THE GIGALEAK

L IS REAL!? ...AND OTHER LEAKS

After 24 years, Luigi's finally been found hiding inside Super Mario 64. (Or one of its prototypes, at least.)

SO THE STORY goes that, years ago, some anonymous, unscrupulous hacker managed to access Nintendo's private corporate servers through an exploit found in China's iQue Player network. They were able to download a massive amount of data, containing everything from developers' personal emails to full source code and multiple prototype versions of several classic Nintendo games. This is undoubtedly illegal and morally problematic, but the greater fan community – who now have access to this "gigaleak" of data – has been overjoyed. Why? Well, one big reason is that L is finally real!

For decades, looking for Luigi hidden somewhere in Super Mario 64 has been like searching for Bigfoot – an urban legend that's grown to be larger than life. Much of the mystery surrounded the engraving on the courtyard fountain in Peach's castle, which many fans thought said "L is Real 2401" and took that to be a clue that Luigi was real, and he could somehow be found in the game. Now, 24 years and 01 months later, he actually has been! Courtesy of gigaleak-provided prototype code.

It's no secret that Luigi was planned to star alongside his brother in Super Mario 64 at one time, as Nintendo experimented with a split-screen two-player mode while the game was still in the works. Now bits of that in-progress code have been recovered, reassembled and reintroduced into the game by skilled members of the modding community. Above, in images 1 and 2, you can see what it might have looked like if Nintendo had pushed forward and finished that feature for inclusion in the game's final release!

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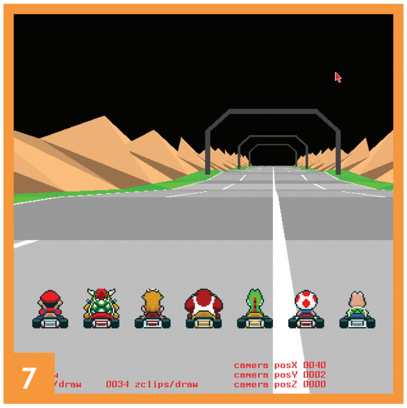

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But that's only the beginning! As its fan-given name suggests, the "gigaleak" is overflowing with other insights into the development of dozens of games. We can't possibly cover them all here, so for now we're highlighting some of the most interesting Mario-related revelations.

Over in image 3, another bit of cut content from Super Mario 64: the Motos! This burly baddie would pick up Mario and toss him, which suggests that it was an early version of the Chuckya enemy that actually made the final cut.

Ever wonder why the power-up that gives Mario the cape in Super Mario World is a feather? It's probably because while the game was in its prototype stages, he would take flight with a pair of angel wings instead! The wings remained in the final game in a different form, only usable by Yoshi as a way to access coin-filled bonus areas.

The fifth image gives us a glimpse of two things we never saw in the final Super Mario World: Bowser's legs! He was once intended to fight our hero on the ground, before his boss battle was finalized to keep him constantly in his Clown Car.

Moving on to this page, we've got a couple of Mario Kart series insights! Image 6 up above shows some in-progress sprites for the original roster members of the first Super Mario Kart game, but even more interesting is the ninth racer that's next to them. Is that Mach Rider? It looks an awful lot like Nintendo's long-lost motorcycle-riding hero, but here he's behind the wheel of a common kart . . . and a hovercraft? Nintendo considered hovercrafts for Kart #1? That's wild.

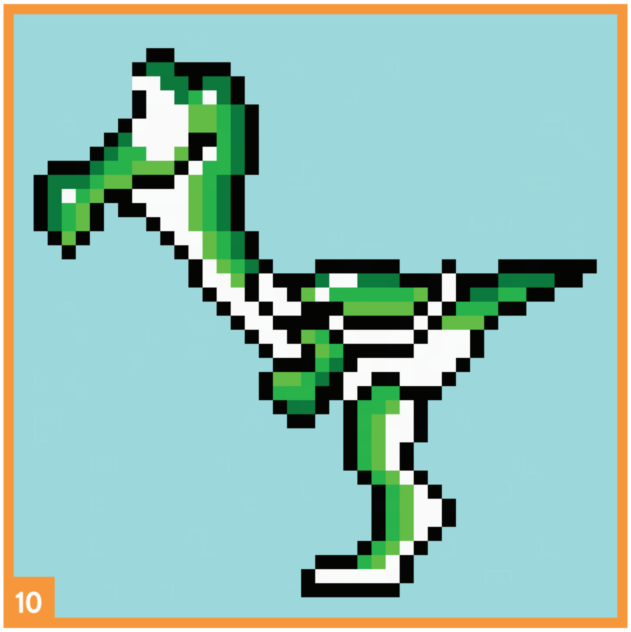
Image 7 is from early development of Mario Kart 64, which used the Super sprites while testing how to build 3D racetracks. Interesting!

Image 8 probably looks familiar to old Nintendo Power readers: It's one of the prototype maps for Super Mario World, and very similar to the one that was famously photographed for inclusion in an NP screenshot, decades ago!

It's not the most shocking map that's been uncovered, though. Image 9 shows what the stage select of Yoshi's Island was once planned to look like! It's gorgeous, and arguably better than what they ultimately went with in the final game.

And finally, speaking of Yoshi again, let's all give thanks that we were spared the existence of the too-skinny monstrosity seen in image 10 below. Apparently, before Yoshi became that round, plump and beautiful dino we know and love today, he was first conceived as long-necked and long-legged. Nintendo absolutely made the right call on sending that design back to the drawing board! **— LUCAS**

9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REVERSE ENGINEERING

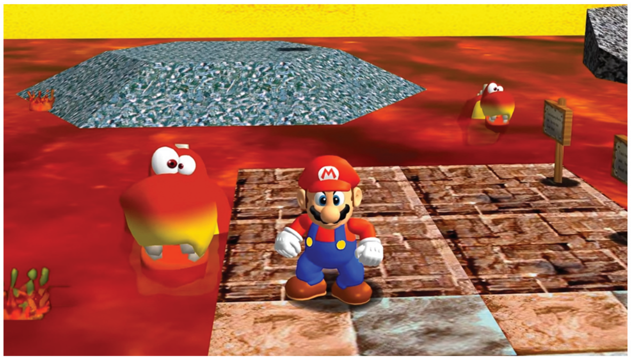
SUPER MARIO 64 FOR PC!?

There's an all-new (entirely unofficial) way to play Mario's 3D debut.

WHILE THE GIGALEAK has provided incredible insight into the inner workings of several past Nintendo classics, and while the most stunning revelation to come from that deluge of old data was undoubtedly the finally confirmed existence of Luigi in Super Mario 64, the truly diehard hobbyists who've been hard at work dissecting that same game for years barely batted an eye at it. Because they'd already gone beyond on their own!

Months before the gigaleak made waves this summer, enterprising programmers had already released to the world a full PC port of Super Mario 64! It was made possible by a 2019 recompilation project that reverse engineered the original game's source code. I don't fully understand the technical side of how such a thing was accomplished, but basically these fans are so skilled and understand the game so thoroughly that they were able to build the whole thing back from scratch. Like an auto mechanic who's so knowledgeable about cars that they could walk into a junkyard, gather up all the separate necessary pieces and assemble a brand-new vehicle on the spot.

Having Super Mario 64 on PC means the game has been able to be modded in multiple wild ways. Visual enhancements are a given, as this version of the game can run in any widescreen ratio and at huge resolutions, with a 60 fps framerate and even disabled draw distance. The models used for Mario and his foes can be swapped out for better, higher-poly versions. Even entirely new and/or lost content can be added – someone's already put Blarggs in Lethal Lava Land! All bets are off on what will happen to this classic next! **– LUCAS**



BY MARK KELLY

FAREWELL, MARK! WE'LL MISS YOU!

NEXT ISSUE

Summer gives way to autumn, and autumn gives way to winter. Even in a year of uncertainty, that much will still remain true. The ongoing adventures of **Pokémon Sword & Shield** will follow the same path, as Trainers will soon wave farewell to the sun-soaked shores of the Isle of Armor and bundle up to embark upon an expedition into the frigid Crown Tundra. There may not be much warmth to be found there, but there will be plenty of Legendary Pokémon!

Besides that third trip to the Galar region, Nintendo's also prepping for players to return to PNF-404 in **Pikmin 3 Deluxe**, putting the finishing touches on the maps that will guide adventurers back to the lands of **Bravely Default** and, perhaps, even getting ready to open the gates that lead back to the Mushroom Kingdom and Hyrule once more. But wherever the journey leads us next, it's sure to be full of fun!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #49:

- **POKÉMON SWORD & SHIELD** EXPANSION PASS, PART 2: **THE CROWN TUNDRA**
- **NEW POKÉMON SNAP**
- **PIKMIN 3 DELUXE**
- **SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE** FIGHTERS PASS VOL. 2 **CONTINUED!**
- **BEST FRIEND FOREVER**
- **NINJALA**
- **SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD DELUXE**
- **SUPER MARIO 3D REMASTERS**
- **BRAVELY DEFAULT II**
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: **BREATH OF THE WILD 2**
- **YS IX:** MONSTRUM NOX
- THE LEGEND OF HEROES: **TRAILS OF COLD STEEL III**
- **WINDBOUND**
- AND MUCH **MORE!**

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020

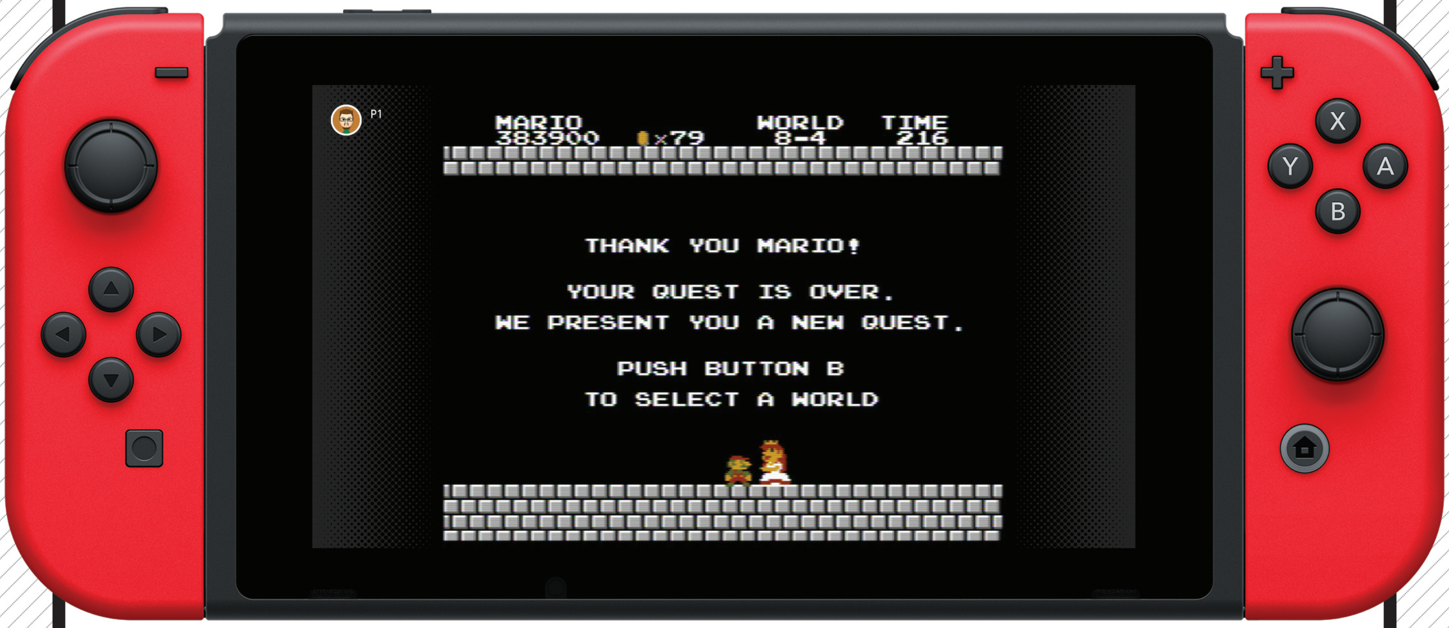
THE SAVE THE PRINCESS CHALLENGE!

ONE OF OUR Super Mario Player's Poll questions asked whether or not you'd ever completed the original Super Mario Bros. from start to finish. Have you ever saved the princess from her very first kidnapping? Overwhelmingly, the response was "No." (Flip back to this issue's Inbox to see just a few of those confirmations of coming up short.) But I'm not surprised! Super Mario Bros., in its first handful of forms especially, can be a tough game to conquer!

. . . So our new challenge is to do just that! Beat Super Mario Bros.! Fire up that old-school Mario quest that we've spent this issue celebrating, and, in honor of its 35th anniversary, put in the work to reach the screen of success pictured below. It's the Save the Princess Challenge!

Now, if you're reading this magazine, you probably already have access to the game. In multiple versions for many of you, I'm sure. But as one last reminder, it's currently playable for free if you own any variety of Nintendo Switch – it's part of the NES lineup available for subscribers to the Nintendo Switch Online service, and there's a free trial of that you can sign up for. It may be your best bet.

The Nintendo Switch version is helpful too in that it offers both Restore Points and a rewind function that can help you tackle any tricky parts as many times as you need to without ever seeing the Game Over screen. Try to save the princess using those tools. Then, if you succeed, challenge yourself further! Try to complete the game without that assistance. Then try to finish it without using any Warp Zones too! However you play, though, just remember to have fun! **— LUCAS**



(I never beat Super Mario Bros. as a kid. It wasn't until years later, as an adult, that I finally did it!)

NF

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